



**The Camp and Church Leadership Project:
Summer Staff Survey Report**

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Introduction and Contents

This report details the findings of the Camp and Church Leadership Project 2021 Summer Staff surveys.

The Camp and Church Leadership Project is a research initiative seeking to cultivate church leadership among young adults who have engaged in camping ministries. It is funded by a Youth and Young Adult Ministry Grant from the ELCA Campaign and is being conducted by Sacred Playgrounds, in partnership with the La Crosse Area Synod. It focuses on ministries of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Major phases of the research project included a series of interviews with former summer staff members (spring 2020), a survey of rostered ministers in the ELCA (fall 2020), and a survey of summer staff members at Lutheran Outdoor Ministries organizations (summer 2021). Major findings are available at www.sacredplaygrounds.com/cclp.

The summer staff survey was designed to assess impacts on the young leaders serving on camp staff. All member organizations of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) were invited to participate. The resulting sample of 50 summer camps represented almost half of all LOM organizations. Staff members from each participating camp completed a pre-summer questionnaire upon arrival (May or June 2021). They were also encouraged to complete a post-summer questionnaire at the end of the summer. Those who left camp early or did not complete the end-of-summer survey prior to departure were sent the survey via email. Participation was incentivized by entering staff into a drawing for Amazon gift cards. Each questionnaire was available in online and paper formats. Staff provided an anonymous code that allowed the two questionnaires to be matched. Questions in the survey were developed to measure outcomes of the summer staff experience, quality of the experience, and key characteristics associated with experience and outcomes.

Contents of this Report

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS.....	3
WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY?.....	4
The Faith Lives of Summer Staff members.....	5
College and Campus Ministry Experiences:	7
Summary of Summer Staff Belief and Faith Commitment.....	8
Regional Differences.....	10
MOTIVATION for Working at Summer Camp.....	11
Staff Mental Health	13
Staff Learning Goals/Outcomes:	15
THE SUMMER STAFF EXPERIENCE	16
Staff Mental Health During the Summer	21
THE IMPACTS OF WORKING ON SUMMER STAFF.....	24
Factors that Impacted Staff Outcomes.....	26
Impacts on Call to Ministry and Church Leadership.....	29
Demographic Differences in Outcomes	30
Major Factors Impacting Staff Growth.....	31
Factor 1: A Community of Faith	31
Factor 2: A Supportive Community.....	32
Staff Perceptions of Camp Takeaways	34

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

General Observations:

- The COVID-19 pandemic exerted a great deal of pressure on the summer staff experience. Only a few of the participating camps had normal summer camp operations in 2020, and most camps had modified programs in 2021. About half of all respondents had never served on camp staff before, and many of the ones who previously served were not on staff in 2020. Additionally, many camps were short-staffed in 2021, increasing the work pressure on staff members. Some camps hired from a reduced pool of candidates that affected staff quality. Respondent comments reflected these challenges.
- Additionally, there was decreased church attendance and campus ministry participation in 2020-21. Many of these ministries had long periods during which they did not gather or only met virtually. These realities affected respondent participation and faith engagement in the months prior to camp (Figure 8).
- There was an increase in mental health challenges across all demographics during the pandemic. Survey responses indicate a very high level of mental health concerns among summer staff members at the beginning of the summer (pages 13-14) that largely persisted during the summer (pages 21-22).

Staff Experience and Outcomes

- Most staff members indicated very positive experiences. Open-ended responses were mostly positive, and large majorities agreed that they got along with fellow staff members (94%) and felt supported by supervisors (84%). Staff also indicated that the experience was highly impactful. At the end of the summer, 92% of staff agreed that the experience had a significant impact on their lives, 76% agreed they were strengthened in their faith, and 86% agreed they grew in self-confidence (Figure 26). However, many of these impacts were difficult to measure from the beginning of camp to end of camp because of differing camp experiences (Tables 4-6). The overall story was one of non-growth in most areas.
- Leadership ability was the clearest item of overall growth among participating staff. In addition to 95% of staff agreeing that they grew in leadership abilities (Figure 26), the item “I feel confident in my ability to be a leader” was the only item to show significant positive growth from the beginning to end of summer across a diversity of camps and qualities of experience (Table 5).
- There was high staff burn-out during the summer (Figure 21). This was directly associated with the amount of sleep staff reported getting (Figure 22), the amount of support they received, and the amount of agency they reported having (page 32). The high levels of mental health challenges evident in the pre-summer survey persisted during the camp experience and were much higher among those with signs of mental health challenges at the beginning of the summer (Table 2). Those who reported exhaustion or burn-out at the end of the summer were significantly less likely to show growth in multiple outcomes (Figure 27).

Markers of Growth and Non-Growth

- A large portion of summer staff arrived at camp with low or moderately low levels of belief in God and faith engagement, with large portions disagreeing with basic faith statements (Figure 12). A small majority of incoming staff (54%) had high levels of both belief and faith relevance/engagement, categorized as “highly committed.” Those who served on summer staffs that were majority highly committed Christians tended to grow in their faith commitment, while those who served at camps where only a minority were highly committed Christians tended to decline in their faith commitment during the summer (page 31).
- In addition to the faith community, the other key factors that contributed significantly to staff growth in multiple outcomes were the amount of support they received during the summer and the amount of agency they felt they had. The more perceived support and agency, the greater the outcomes (pages 32-33).
- The experience of serving on summer staff seemed to have an overall negative impact on perceptions of congregational ministries and the church, in general. In spite of a sharp increase in leadership skills and confidence, there was no widespread increase in perceived call to professional ministry. However, a small group of staff members from a variety of camps perceived a call to ministry during the summer (page 29).

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY?

We heard from **880 summer staff** age 18+
from **50 LOM camps**

Pre-Summer Survey	Post-Summer Survey	# MATCHED
880	594	517

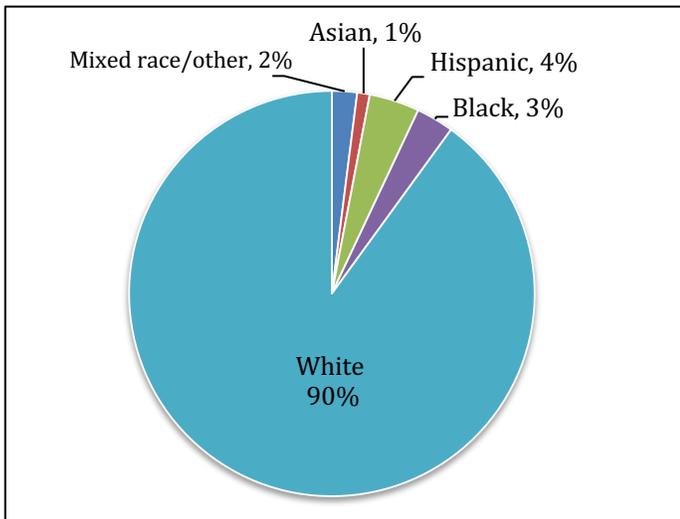
Figure 1: Camp Distribution Among ELCA Regions



Average age was **20**, with
8% under 18 (*disqualified*) and 71% ages 18-21

31% had never been a camper at their camp, while
49% were campers 5 or more times!
Almost 1/2 were campers at a *different camp*: **45%**
31% did day camp at their camp as a child

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of Responding Staff, n=880



Denomination:

Lutheran	79%
Non-denominational	5%
Catholic	3%
Other Mainline	3%
Evangelical tradition	2%
“Just Christian” or unsure	5%
Not Christian	3%

61% female **36%** male **3%** other
24% identified as **LGBTQIA+**
78% were enrolled in college in fall 2021

Figure 3: Primary Role of Summer Staff Respondents

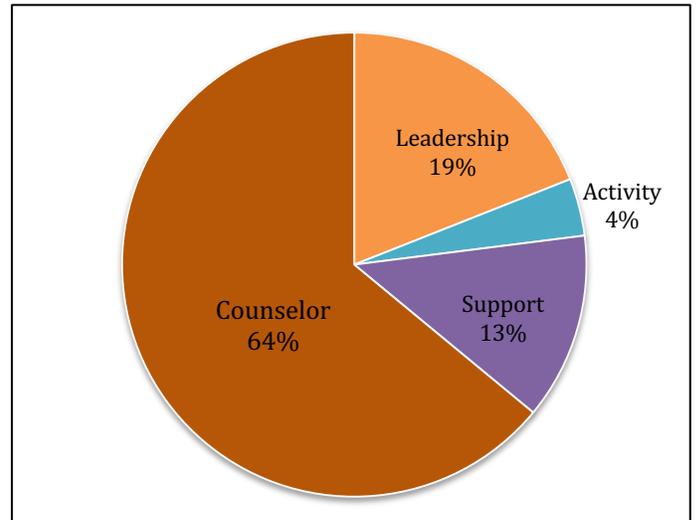
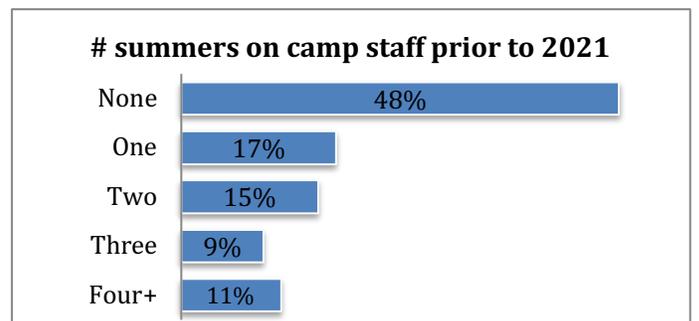


Figure 4: Number of Summers on Camp Staff



- Only **1/3** of respondents served on camp staff in 2020

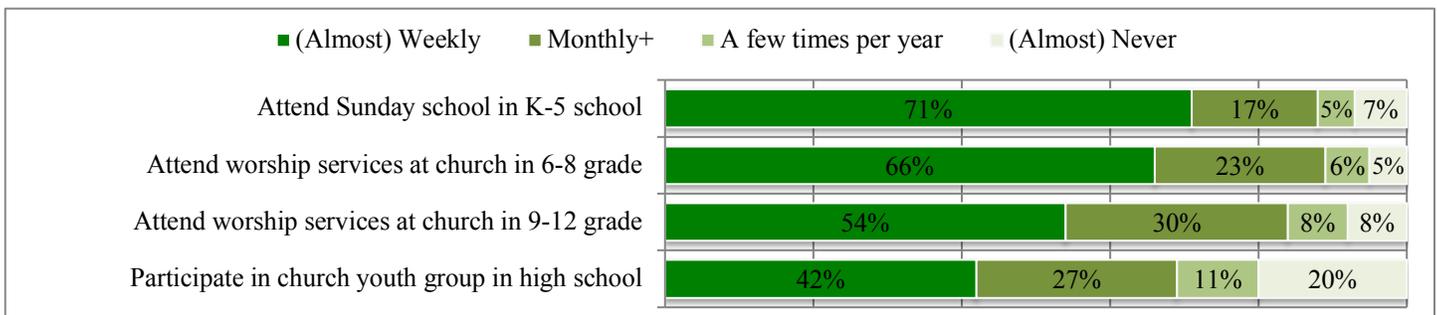
The Faith Lives of Summer Staff members

Summer staff members were asked about their faith lives and practices before coming to camp (pre-summer survey) and during their time on staff (post-summer survey).

Respondent Engagement with Lutheran Church prior to adulthood (n=802):

- 61% “I was born and raised an ELCA Lutheran”
- 20% Raised in a non-Lutheran Christian denomination
- 6% Family became engaged with an ELCA congregation partway through childhood
- 4% Raised in a Lutheran tradition other than the ELCA (e.g. LCMS or LCMC)
- 4% Blended congregational upbringing, including ELCA Lutheran and other denomination(s)
- 3% Non-Christian home growing up
- 2% Other

Figure 5: Church Participation in Home Growing Up (pre-summer), n=797



Confirmation: 84% of staff members were confirmed prior to turning 18

Faith Summary

All told, three-quarters (76%) of staff members were regular church attendees (monthly or more) throughout grade school (59% ELCA Regulars and 17% non-ELCA Regulars). Others (8%) had a pattern of *disengagement*, where they were heavily engaged in elementary and/or middle school, with declining attendance in high school. Still others (6%) had the opposite pattern characterized by increased *engagement* as they grew older, with particularly high engagement in high school. Of the remaining, 5% had inconsistent attendance patterns in grade school, and only 5% were mostly *unengaged* throughout childhood.

Figure 6: Frequency of Religious Practices in Home Growing Up (pre-summer), n=799

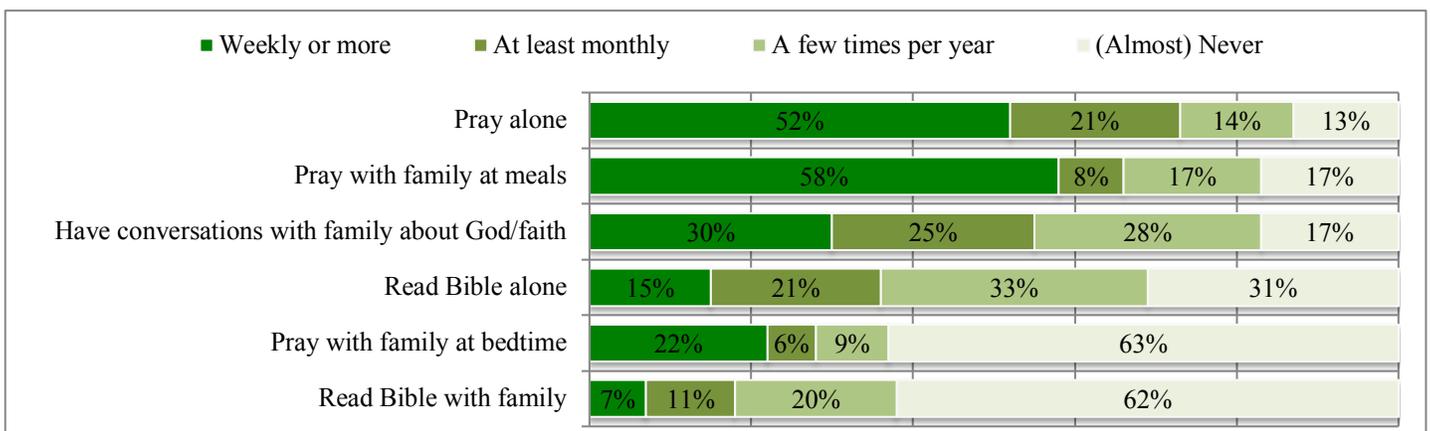


Figure 7: Frequency of Participation in Specialized Christian Activities as Child or Youth (n=811)

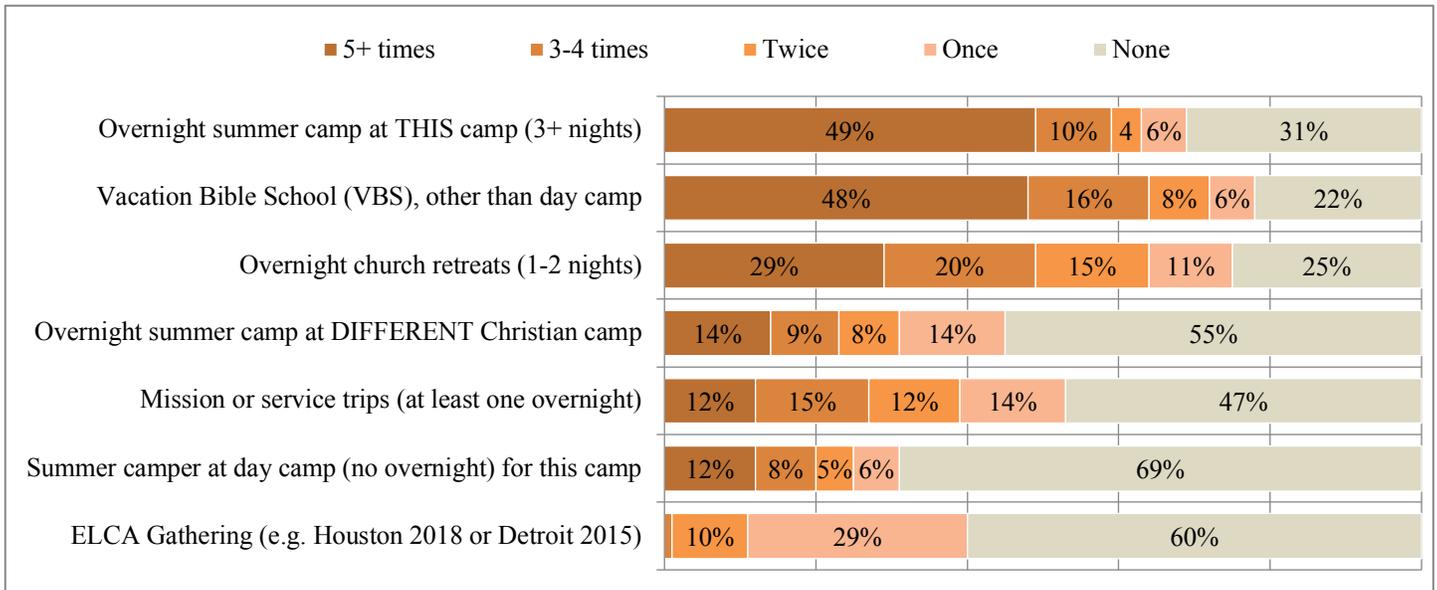
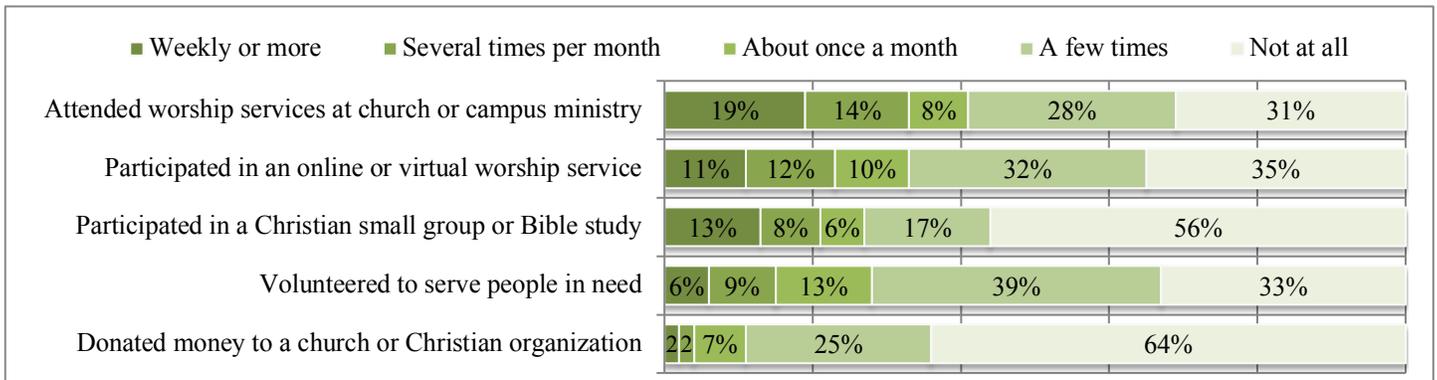


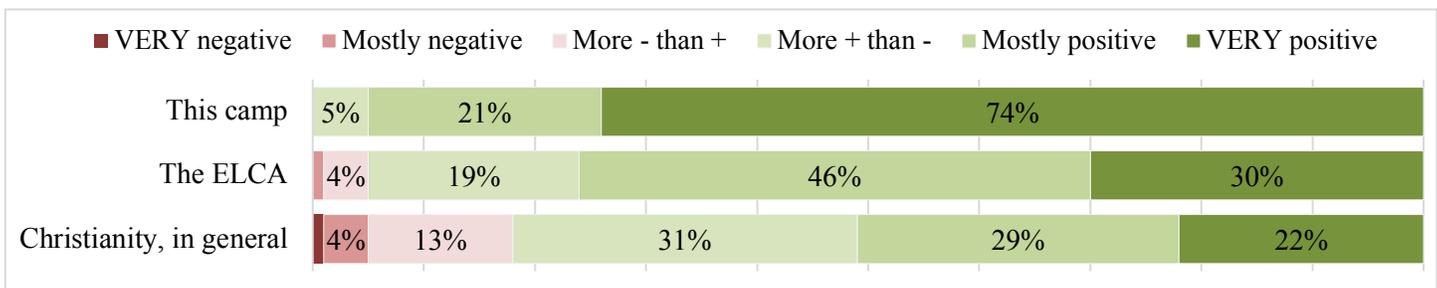
Figure 8: Frequency of Religious Practices THIS YEAR (2021) (pre-summer), n=795



When considering THIS YEAR (2021), **51%** of incoming staff members reported **praying** weekly or more (21% prayed daily), while 27% reported praying less than monthly or not at all. **22%** of staff reported **reading the Bible** at least weekly (5% read daily), while 60% reported reading the Bible less than monthly or not at all.

It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected religious practices, particularly church attendance. Almost half of respondents (48%) participated in church services (either in person or online) only a few times or not at all in 2021.

Figure 9: Perceptions of Camp and the Church, pre-summer survey, n=798



- Those born and raised in the ELCA had much more positive impressions of the ELCA than those raised in other denominations or non-Christian homes. However, the reverse was true about impressions of Christianity in general. Those raised in the ELCA had less positive impressions than those raised in other denominations.

College and Campus Ministry Experiences:

During the 2020-2021 school year, 74% of respondents (age 18+ only) were enrolled in a college or university. Here is how they responded to their status during the school year:

- 16% were enrolled in an ELCA college or university
- 16% were enrolled in a private school not affiliated with the ELCA
- 42% were enrolled in a state college or university
- 16% indicated that they had not yet attended college (over three-quarters of these were 18, suggesting that they were in high school in spring 2021)
- 10% had attended college previously but were not enrolled in 2020-21

Figure 10: Level of Involvement in Lutheran Campus Ministry, comparing ELCA and non-ELCA college attendees

Level of Involvement in Lutheran Campus Ministry	ELCA College n=129	Non-ELCA College n=446	Total N=575
Leadership team, heavily involved	19%	6%	9%
Regularly involved (almost every week)	12%	9%	10%
Frequently involved (at least monthly)	8%	5%	5%
Occasionally or inconsistently involved	20%	11%	13%
Not involved (almost never participate)	37%	57%	52%
NOT AVAILABLE	4%	12%	11%

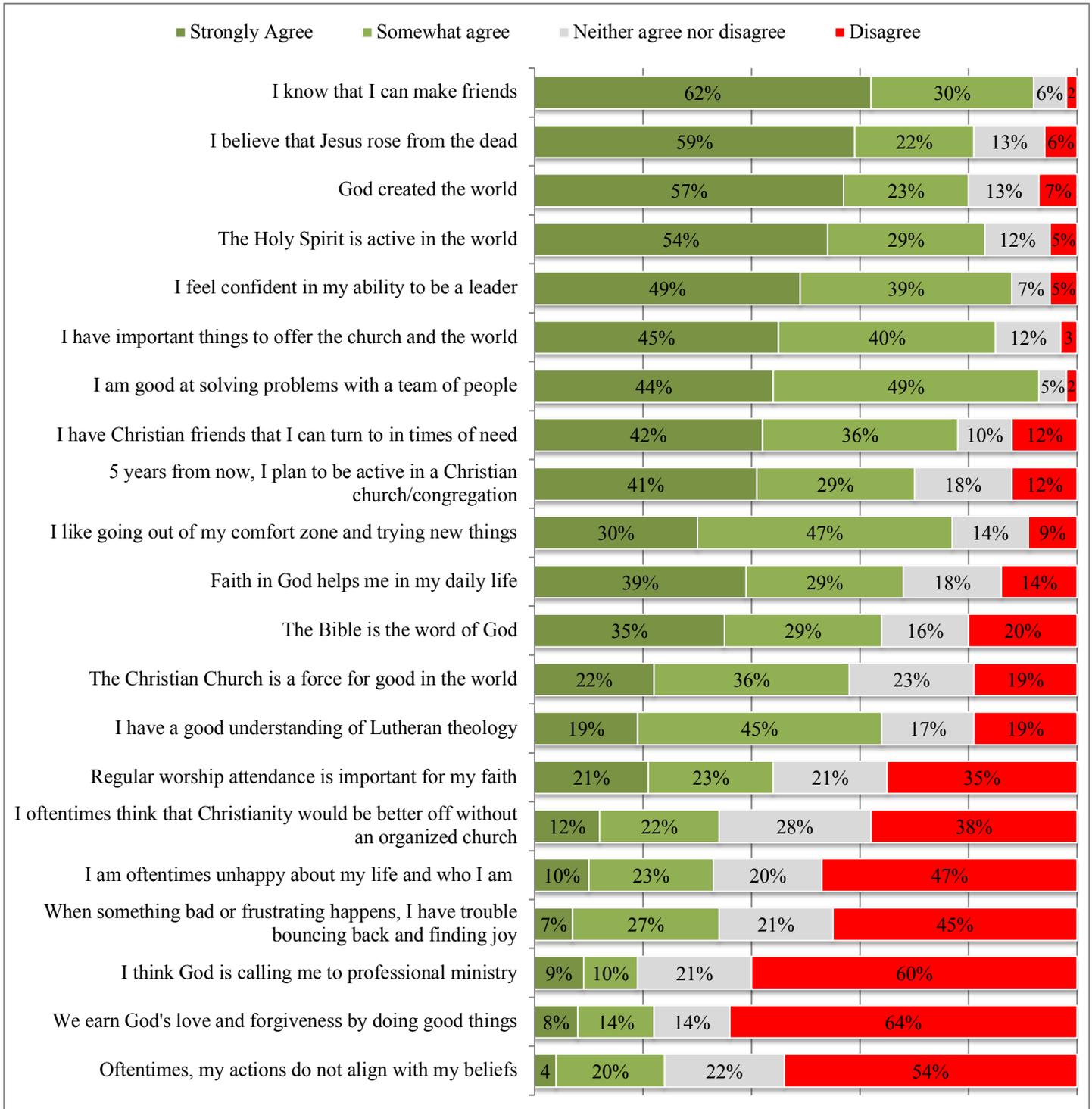
Figure 11: Level of Involvement in Evangelical Campus Ministry, comparing ELCA and non-ELCA college attendees

Involvement in Cru, Navigators, or other Evangelical campus ministry	ELCA College n=114	Non-ELCA College n=434	Total N=548
Leadership team, heavily involved	6%	5%	5%
Regularly involved (almost every week)	2%	5%	5%
Frequently involved (at least monthly)	3%	2%	2%
Occasionally or inconsistently involved	2%	3%	3%
Not involved (almost never participate)	73%	70%	71%
NOT AVAILABLE	14%	15%	15%

Campus ministry involvement was quite low in 2020-21 among staff respondents. It is unclear how much of the non-involvement was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which shut down many in-person activities during the school year. Combining all responses, only 30% of responding LOM summer staff enrolled in college were frequently involved in campus ministry during the 2020-21 school year. Another 14% were occasionally or inconsistently involved, while the remaining 56% were not involved at all in campus ministry. This is roughly equivalent to the 59% who attended worship only a few times or not at all in 2021 prior to arrival at camp. It reveals that a majority of incoming LOM summer staff were disengaged from Christian communal practices in the months prior to camp.

Summary of Summer Staff Belief and Faith Commitment

Figure 12: Pre-Summer agreement with faith and self-confidence statements (pre-summer), n=792



Incoming summer staff members had a variety of faith perspectives. Large percentages of summer staff did not agree with basic tenets of the Christian faith, like God creating the world and Jesus rising from the dead. Less than two-thirds (64%) agreed with the statement “The Bible is the word of God.” They agreed even less with positive statements about the Christian church. Only 58% agreed that the Christian church is a force for good in the world, and less than half (44%) agreed that regular worship attendance is important for their faith. Respondents were split over the statement “I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church,” with 34% agreeing and 38% disagreeing.

Respondents were more consistent in their agreement with statements related to self-confidence and social skills. However, it is notable that a third (33%) agreed that they were oftentimes unhappy about their life and who they are.

Belief Index: Four survey items combined to create a belief index. This index comes from the Effective Camp Research Project, which focused on middle and high school aged summer campers. The four items include:

- God created the world
- I believe that Jesus rose from the dead
- The Holy Spirit is active in the world
- The Bible is the word of God

Together, these four statements comprise an overview of basic Christian beliefs. Based on agreement level with these four statements, staff were categorized as having “low belief” (average agreement less than 3 – neither agree nor disagree), “moderate belief” (average agreement at least 3 but less than 4 – somewhat agree), “high belief (average agreement 4-4.5), or “very high belief” (average greater than 4.5).

A large minority of incoming summer staff members had low (9%) or moderate (22%) beliefs. The majority were high (29%) or very high (40%).

Faith Relevance Index: An additional index combined four other survey items to measure faith relevance, an indication of how important or meaningful faith and Christian practices were in the staff members’ lives. Once again, this index is taken directly from the Effective Camp Research Project. The four items included were:

- I have important things to offer the church and the world.
- Faith in God helps me in my daily life.
- 5 years from now, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.
- I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.

As with the belief index, the majority of respondents had high (37%) or very high (27%) levels of faith relevance. However, a large minority had low (11%) or moderate (25%) levels of faith relevance.

Faith Commitment Summary: Taken together, almost a quarter of incoming summer staff members (23%) had low or moderate levels of both belief and faith relevance. This group might be considered “uncommitted.” They tended to disagree with one or more major tenets of the Christian faith, and faith was not particularly important in their lives. In contrast, a small majority of staff (54%) had high or very high levels of both belief and faith relevance. These were the “highly committed” Christians. The remaining 23% of staff had a combination of high and moderate or low levels of belief and faith relevance. These might be considered “marginally committed.”

The highly committed group was much more likely to participate in religious practices (church attendance, prayer, Bible study, service to people in need, and donating money to Christian organizations). For example, 71% of the highly committed group indicated that they prayed alone weekly or more, compared with only 11% of the uncommitted group.

As expected, these three groups had very different motivations for working at summer camp. All three groups sought to experience community and have fun. However, while 90% of the highly committed group said “I believe this is where God is calling me to serve” was a very or extremely important motivator, only 24% of the uncommitted group said the same. “To grow in my personal faith” was very or extremely important for 85% of the highly committed group but only 28% of the uncommitted group. In fact, the highly committed group indicated that every single motivating factor was more important than the uncommitted group except for one: “To earn or save money.”

As we will see, religious commitment also impacted the summer staff experience.

Regional Differences

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries organizations are heavily concentrated in the Midwest, where there are many more Lutherans than other parts of the country. Almost half of all staff respondents worked at camps in the Midwest, centered in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Mid-Atlantic states (particularly Pennsylvania) also have a high concentration of Lutherans. Because of this variation, camps in various parts of the country face different demographic realities when recruiting summer staff members.

Participating camps and their responding staff members were distributed as follows:

- **Northeast Region** (predominantly the Mid-Atlantic Region): 7 camps, 123 staff respondents
- **Midwest Region:** 23 camps, 467 respondents
- **South Region** (South Atlantic and Texas camps): 7 camps, 197 respondents
- **West Region** (predominantly the Mountain West): 7 camps, 170 respondents

Church Regulars

There was no significant difference among the four regions in percentage of staff members who grew up as church regulars. The percentage was consistently near 75%, including between 55% and 60% of staff growing up as ELCA regulars. It is evident that the very different concentrations of Lutherans in the various regions did not preclude hiring young adults who were already engaged in the ELCA.

Faith Commitment

Though similar percentages of staff were engaged in congregational ministries in their childhood and youth, the faith commitment varied by region. Those in the Northeast and West were less likely to be categorized as “high committed Christians” compared with those in the Midwest and South. This finding is consistent with national trends. However, the differences were small among summer staff. The percentage of summer staff categorized as highly committed ranged:

- Midwest: 59%
- South: 57%
- West: 48%
- Northeast: 42%

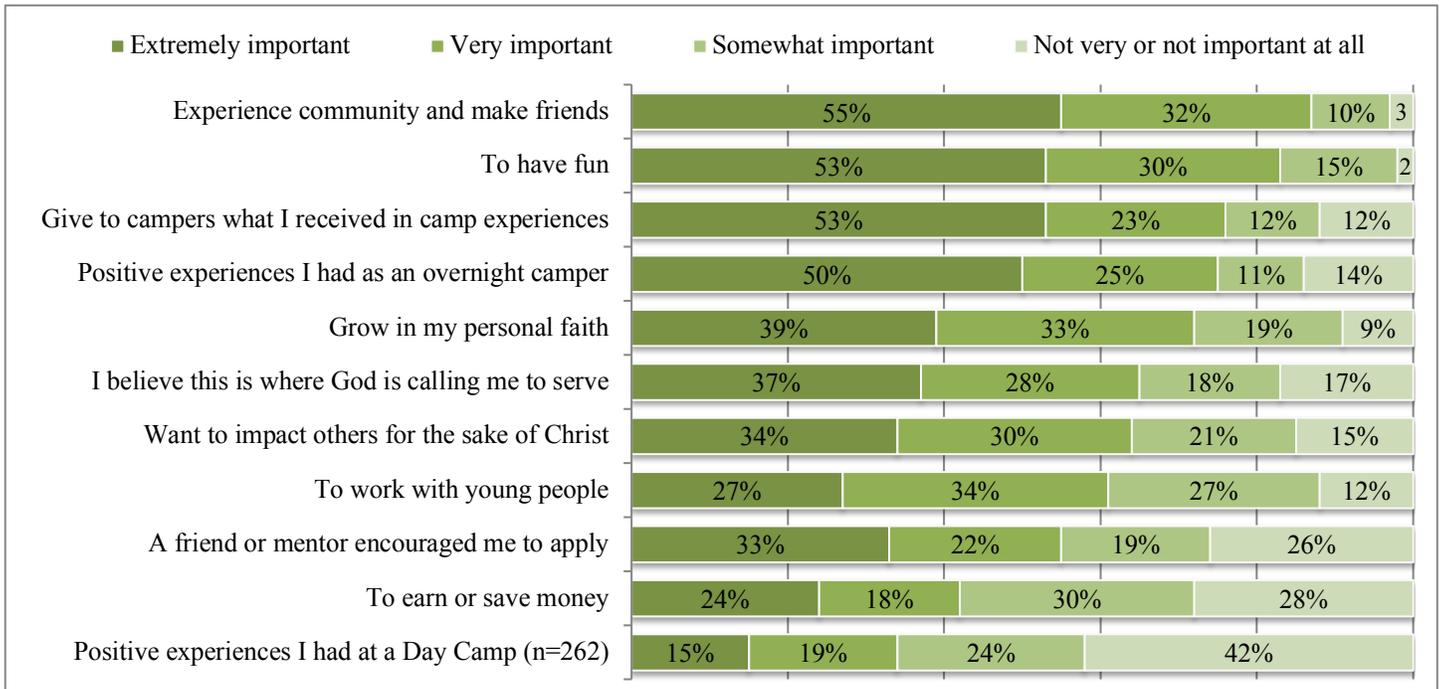
It is notable that the two US sub-regions with the least faith engagement were underrepresented in the study. These are New England (sub-region of the Northeast) and the Pacific States (sub-region of the West). It is clear that faith commitment was lower, in general, among summer staff in the West and Northeast, and it is plausible that the effect would have been greater with higher representation from the Pacific and New England sub-regions.

Other differences:

There were not significant differences among the four regions when it came to other summer staff demographics. They had very similar proportions of gender, age, racial, and LGBTQIA+ diversity. The Southern Region had the highest proportion of BIPOC staff members (14%), and the West had the lowest proportion of LGBTQIA+ staff members (19%). However, there was a great deal of consistency of diversity (or non-diversity, as the case may be) across the regions.

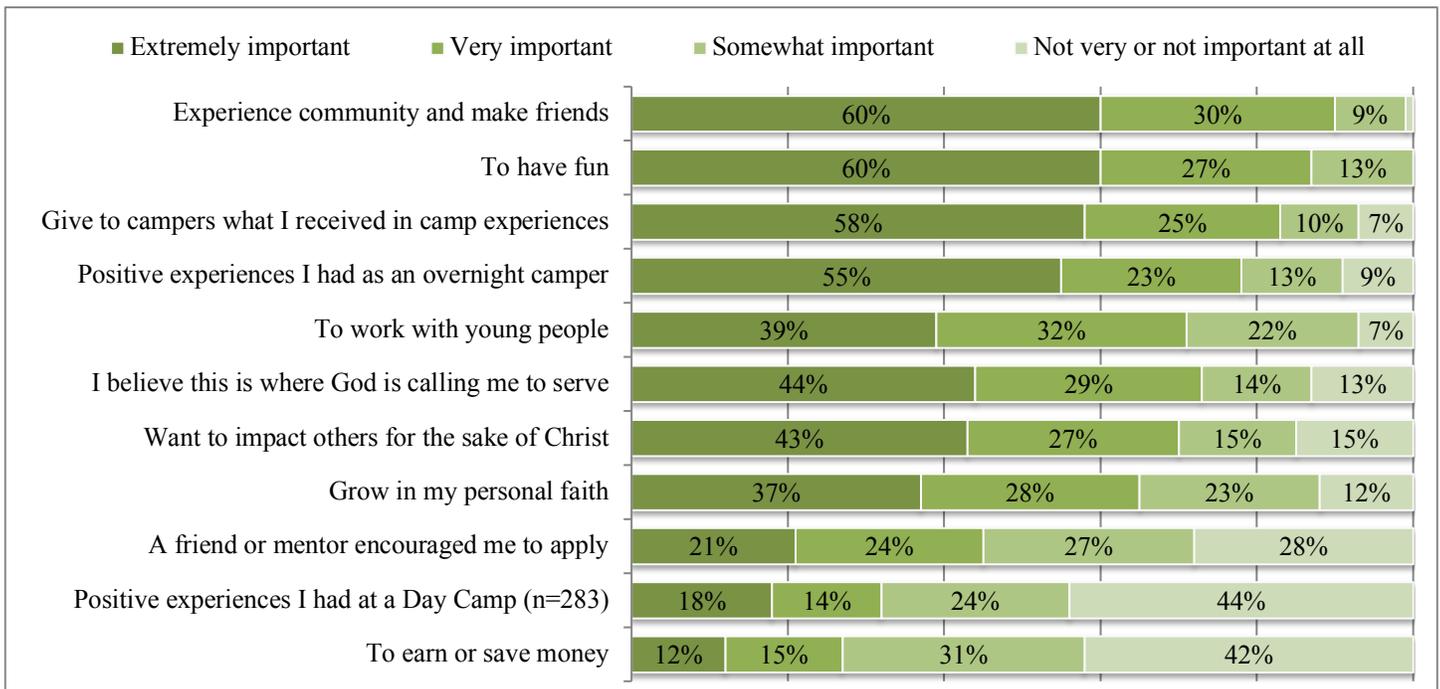
MOTIVATION for Working at Summer Camp

Figure 13: Importance of motivating factors for 1st year staff working at camp (pre-summer), n=383



52% of respondents were returning staff members, **69%** had been overnight campers at the camp, and **31%** had been day campers. **14%** had never been a camper at any Christian camp.

Figure 14: Importance of motivating factors for RETURNING staff working at camp (pre-summer)



- The top 4 motivating factors were identical for first year and returning staff members. Returning staff members were less likely than first-year staff to be motivated by a desire to grow in their personal faith and to earn/save money.

Figure 15: Returning Staff Perceptions of Previous Camp Experiences (n=412)

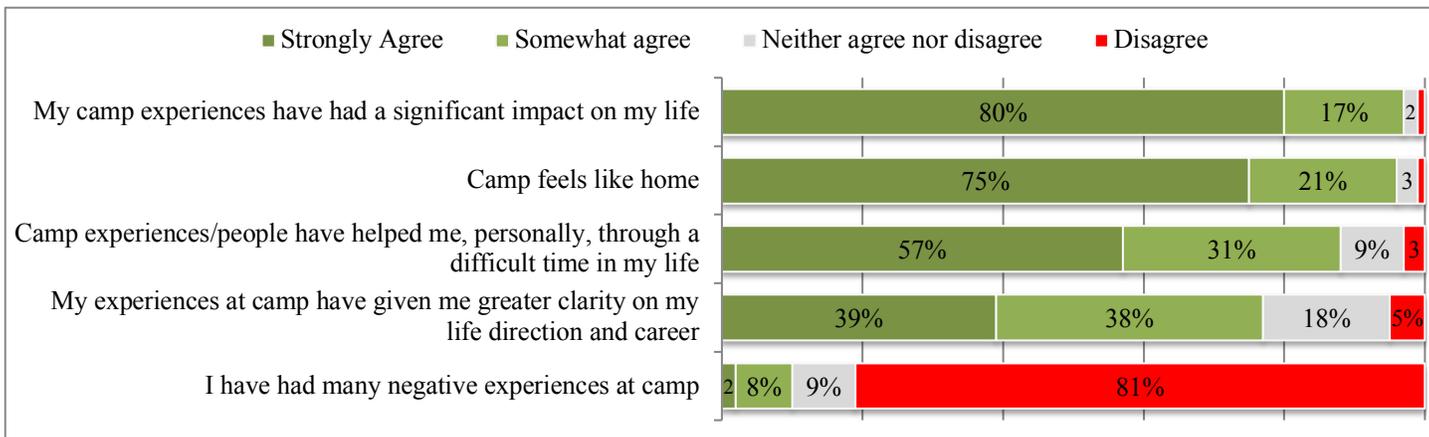
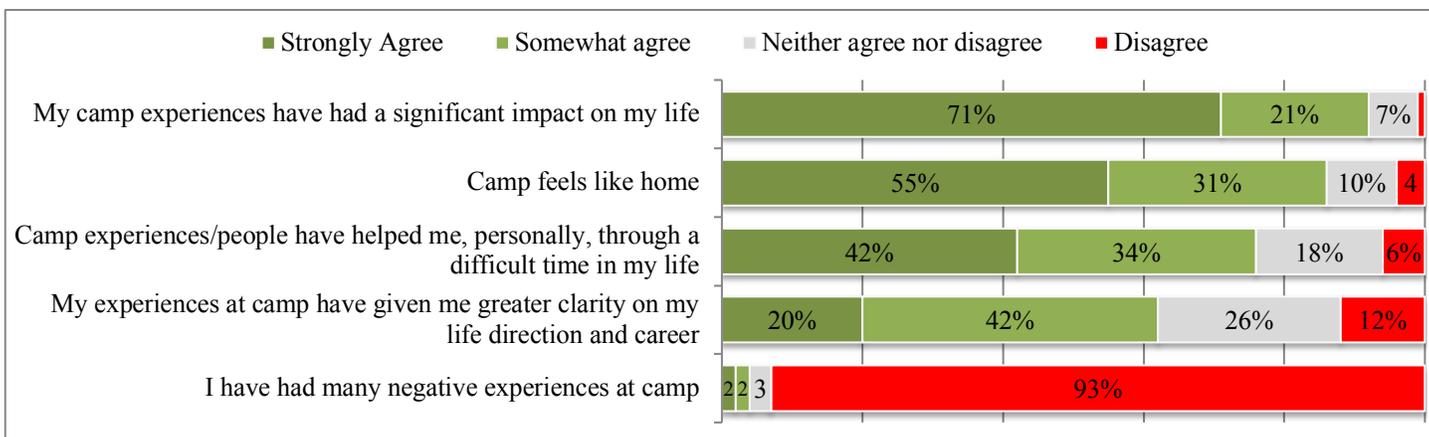
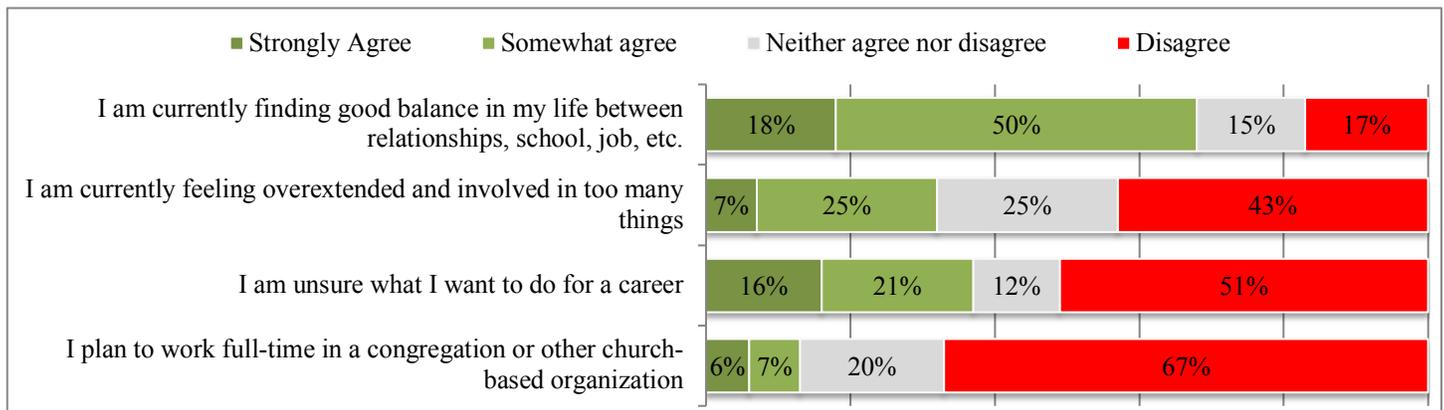


Figure 16: First-Year Staff Perceptions of Previous Camp Experiences (only overnight campers at this camp), n=236



Staff Mental Health

Figure 17: Incoming Staff Member Self-Perception (pre-summer), n=797



- Most of these young people were fairly well-grounded and had healthy self-perceptions. However, almost a third (32%) felt overextended, and a third indicated feeling unhappy about their life and identity. These are much higher than the figures from a similar study of summer staff in 2019 as part of the Camp2Congregation Project.

Many staff members were living busy and stressed lives. In the months leading up to camp, **31%** of incoming staff members reported having **thoughts of self-harm** at least a few times, including a sizeable number (13%) that had these thoughts at least monthly.

Much more common were feelings of **overwhelming anxiety**: **69%** of incoming staff members reported having such feelings at least monthly in 2021, including 35% reporting weekly or more.

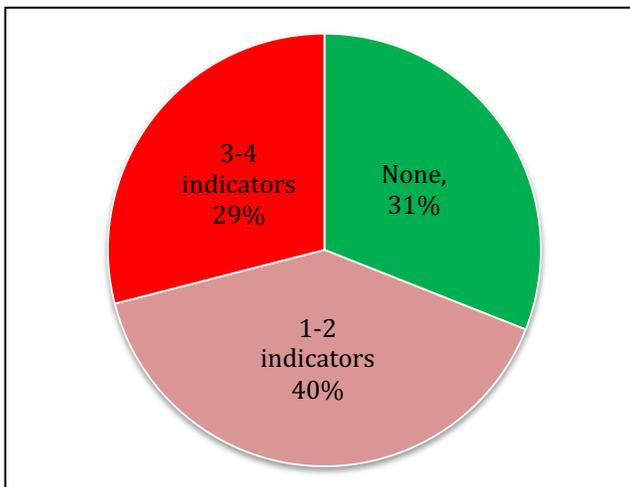
Almost as common as anxiety was **feeling very down or hopeless**: **56%** of incoming staff members reported having such feelings at least monthly in 2021, including 18% reporting weekly or more.

Four survey items were combined to provide a larger picture of mental health challenges. These included:

- Thoughts of self-harm at least once or twice in 2021
- Felt overwhelming anxiety several times a month or more in 2021
- Felt very down or hopeless several times a month or more in 2021
- Somewhat or strongly agreed, “I am oftentimes unhappy with my life and who I am.”

Respondents were categorized in one of three categories: none of these indicators (31%), 1-2 indicators (40%), or 3-4 indicators (29%).

Figure 18: Summary of Mental Health Challenges, pre-summer survey (n=802)



4 Indicators of Mental Health Challenges

1. Thoughts of self-harm 1-2 times or more in 2021
2. Overwhelming anxiety several times a month or more
3. Very down or hopeless several times a month or more
4. Agreed: "I am oftentimes unhappy with my life and who I am."

Table 1: Differing Pre-Summer Impressions and Experiences based on Mental Health Indicators

	All Staff N=800	No indicators n=248	1-2 indicators n=316	3-4 indicators n=236
Demographic differences				
Median age	20	20	20	20
% Female	61%	46%	69%	65%
% People of color	10%	11%	9%	12%
% ELCA Regulars	53%	51%	54%	54%
% LGBTQIA+	23%	12%	22%	36%
Perceptions of Faith and Church				
<i>Mostly or very positive impressions of ELCA</i>	76%	80%	76%	73%
<i>Mostly or very positive impressions of Christianity</i>	51%	63%	51%	39%
Agree: The Christian Church is a force for good in the world	58%	68%	58%	49%
Agree: I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church	34%	26%	33%	42%
Agree: The Holy Spirit is active in the world	83%	85%	84%	80%
Agree: I believe that Jesus rose from the dead	81%	84%	83%	75%
Agree: Faith in God helps me in my daily life	68%	72%	70%	61%
Self-Confidence				
Agree: I have important things to offer the church and world	85%	87%	88%	79%
Agree: I am good at solving problems with a team of people	93%	94%	94%	91%
Agree: When something bad or frustrating happens, I have trouble bouncing back and finding joy	34%	17%	29%	58%
Agree: I feel confident in my ability to be a leader	88%	92%	89%	83%
Agree: I like going out of my comfort zone and trying new things	77%	82%	78%	71%
Agree: I know that I can make friends	92%	95%	93%	87%
Agree: I am currently feeling overextended and involved in too many things	32%	20%	34%	42%
Agree: I am currently finding good balance in my life between relationships, school, job, etc.	68%	83%	67%	51%
Agree: I am unsure what I want to do for a career	37%	34%	35%	42%

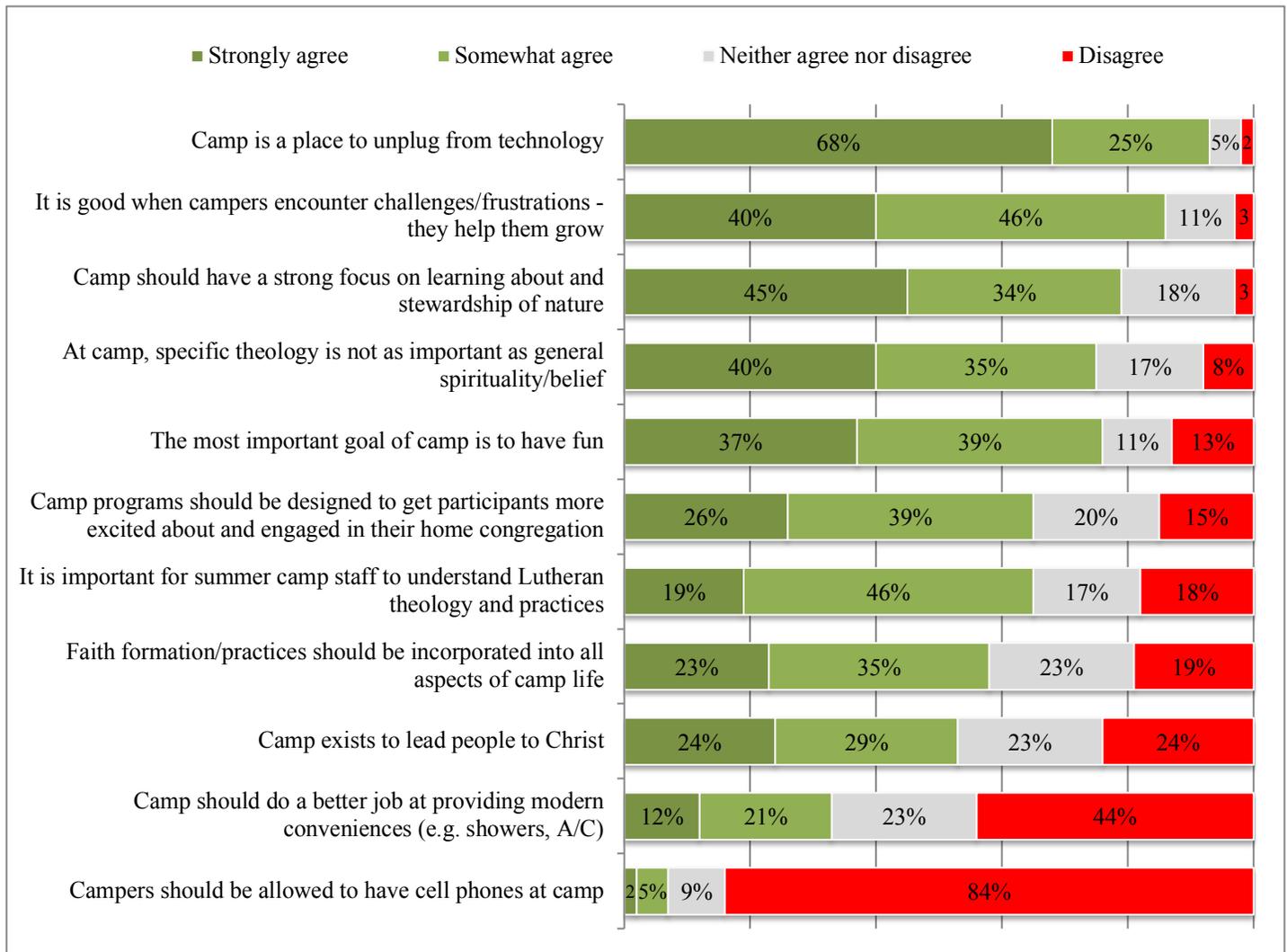
Staff Learning Goals/Outcomes:

The pre-camp survey also included an open-ended question asking incoming staff members what they hoped to get out of their summer working at camp. 739 staff members answered this question. The percentages below do not add up to 100% because many staff members listed multiple learning goals. The major themes are listed below. The major overarching themes from these responses can be summarized as saying there was a deeply felt need for community and personal connection, directly related to the need for personal support, finding life direction, and strengthening faith. Additionally, we can observe that staff emphasized personal growth over service to others. These staff primarily expressed desire to grow personally through the experience or find a place of healing/support. The desire to impact or serve others was a major theme, but it was tertiary in importance, after building community and personal growth/experience. This, of course, can be explained by the wording of the question, which specifically asked what the staff hoped to get out of the experience, so it is not necessarily the case that staff were more self-focused than other-focused.

1. **Build relationships/community (47%)** – The number one desired outcome was building relationships with other people. Most of these staff indicated interest in building specific friendships or strengthening existing relationships. Many of them expressed hope that these friendships would be lasting or “life-long.” Others expressed this theme in terms of living in community for the summer, without explicit reference to individual friendships. Many staff members connected this theme to faith, saying that they wanted a strong Christian community. Others said more broadly that they hoped to make new friends.
2. **Grow in personal faith (38%)** – Over a third of responding staff expressed a desire to grow in personal faith in God. Staff members expressed this as strengthening/growing/renewing their faith and gaining a stronger relationship with God/Jesus. There were additional staff members (3%) that indicated a desire to learn more about theology or Christian beliefs, but they did not express this in terms of personal faith.
3. **Personal growth and meaning (25%)** – A quarter of staff members indicated their hopes for personal growth and self-improvement during the summer. Many of these comments were vague (e.g. “personal growth”), but some were specific, such as those hoping to grow in self-confidence (6% of total) or more generally learn more about themselves (4%). A large number were also searching for personal meaning or purpose in their lives (7%).
4. **Impact others (25%)** – A quarter of incoming staff members said that what they hoped to get out of the summer centered at least partially on service to other people. They wanted to have an impact on others, particularly the campers that would be in their care. Many of their responses included references to faith, such as wanting to impact others for the sake of Christ or help others grow in their relationship with God (11% of the total specifically mentioned evangelistic themes). Many of the staff indicated a desire to “give back” or help campers experience what they experienced in their camp experiences.
5. **Leadership and vocational skills (16%)** – Many staff members indicated they were hoping to gain career readiness skills. The most common was leadership skills (12% of the total). Others were hoping to gain skills that would help them in their careers, especially experience working with kids.
6. **Fun, new experiences (16%)** – A large number of staff members expressed a desire to have fun and simply have new experiences. These were oftentimes paired with other themes, such as self-improvement or service to others, but many staff members indicated that having fun or doing something new was their primary motivator. A related theme was a desire to step outside their comfort zone (1%).
7. **Get away (7%)** – A less common theme was the simple desire to get away from the stress or busyness of their normal lives. Some of these staff were looking for a place of happiness (1%) or stability/safety (3%). Only a few specifically mentioned a desire to connect with nature (2%). A small percentage of staff (1%) specifically tied these desires to improving their mental health. Only one staff member mentioned getting away from technology.

THE SUMMER STAFF EXPERIENCE

Figure 19: Respondent Philosophy of Camping Ministry (post-summer), n=529



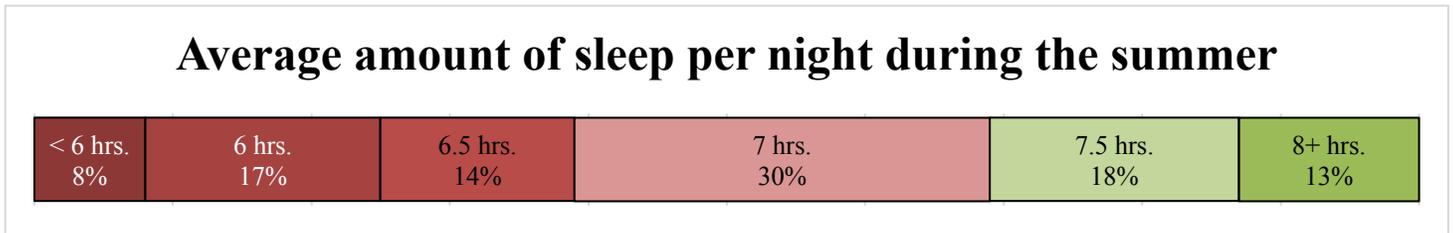
Consensus items among summer staff, directors, parents, and pastors:

- Unplugged from technology:** There is a broad consensus that camp is a place to unplug from technology. 93% of responding LOM summer staff agreed with this statement, more than any other regarding camp philosophy. This level of agreement is in line with LOM camp directors (88%), LOM camper parents (97%), and ELCA pastors (85%). Closely related is the agreement that campers should not be allowed to have cell phones at camp. Only 7% of staff agreed that campers should be allowed to have cell phones, roughly equivalent to camper parents (6%). ELCA pastors tended to agree considerably more with this statement (13%).
- Creation Learning and Stewardship:** 79% of staff respondents agreed that camp should have a strong focus on learning about and stewardship of nature. This was almost identical with the agreement level of LOM camp directors who said their camp has this focus (77%) and was close to the agreement level of ELCA pastors (88%).
- The importance of challenge:** 86% of responding summer staff members agreed that it is good when campers encounter challenges and frustrations because these experiences help them grow. This was only slightly less than the parent agreement level (92%) and higher than that of ELCA pastors (76%).

Where summer staff have different views:

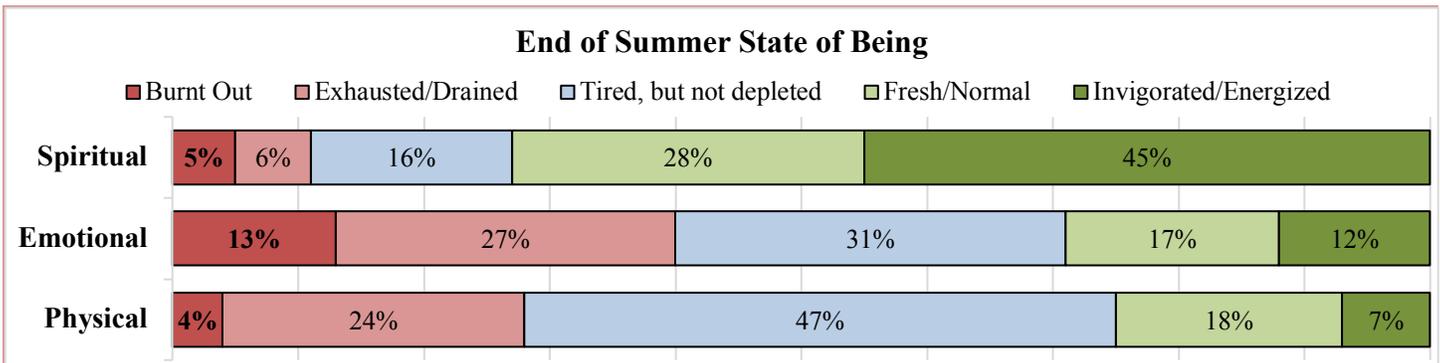
- 1. The place of faith:** Only slightly more than half (58%) of summer staff agreed that faith formation should be incorporated into all aspects of camp. This was compared to 86% of LOM camp directors, 92% of ELCA pastors, and 81% of LOM camper parents. Likewise, only 53% of staff agreed that camp exists to lead people to Christ. On this, the agreement level was almost exactly the same as ELCA pastors (also 53%), but much lower than LOM directors (76%).
- 2. The importance of theology:** Responding camp staff had a much lower regard for specific theology than all other camp advocates and leaders. Almost two-thirds agreed that it was important for staff to understand Lutheran theology and practices, but this was much lower than LOM directors (85%) and ELCA pastors (93%). Instead of specifics, 75% of responding summer staff agreed that at camp, specific theology is not as important as general spirituality or belief. Only 51% of LOM directors and 38% of ELCA pastors agreed with this latter statement.
- 3. Congregational Connection:** Only 65% of summer staff agreed that camp programs should be designed to get participants more excited about and engaged in their home congregation. This is compared with 82% of LOM directors and 81% of ELCA pastors.

Figure 20: Average amount of sleep per night during the summer (Post-summer), n=552



- While sleep needs vary from person to person, it is generally accepted that college-age young people need at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Any less than 7 hours per night would generally be considered sleep deprived. By this measurement, over a third (39%) of responding staff members could be considered sleep deprived in summer 2021, with another third borderline at 7 hours per night.

Figure 21: Reported end-of-summer "State of Being": Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual, n=554



- Staff reported a much higher rate of physical and emotional exhaustion than spiritual exhaustion. However, the rate of reported spiritual exhaustion was more than double that of the 2019 Camp2Congregation Project findings. The rates of physical and emotional exhaustion were also higher than the 2019 study. In 2021, less than half of staff (45%) reported feeling spiritually invigorated or energized at the end of the summer. Meanwhile, over a third (40%) reported feeling emotionally exhausted or burnt out.
- State-of-being was directly correlated with sleep, as shown in the below figure. The more sleep a staff member reported, on average, the less likely they were to report exhaustion or burnout at the end of the summer and the more likely they were to report feeling fresh/normal or invigorated/energized.
- There was no difference in end-of-summer state of being based on the total number of weeks worked. Those who worked 6 weeks or fewer were just as likely to feel exhausted/burnt out as those who worked 10 or more weeks during the summer.
- Considering all three categories of burnout together, over half (52%) of all responding summer staff reported being exhausted or burnt out in at least one of the three categories.

Figure 22: The Relation of Sleep to End-of-Summer Spiritual, Emotional, and Physical State of Being

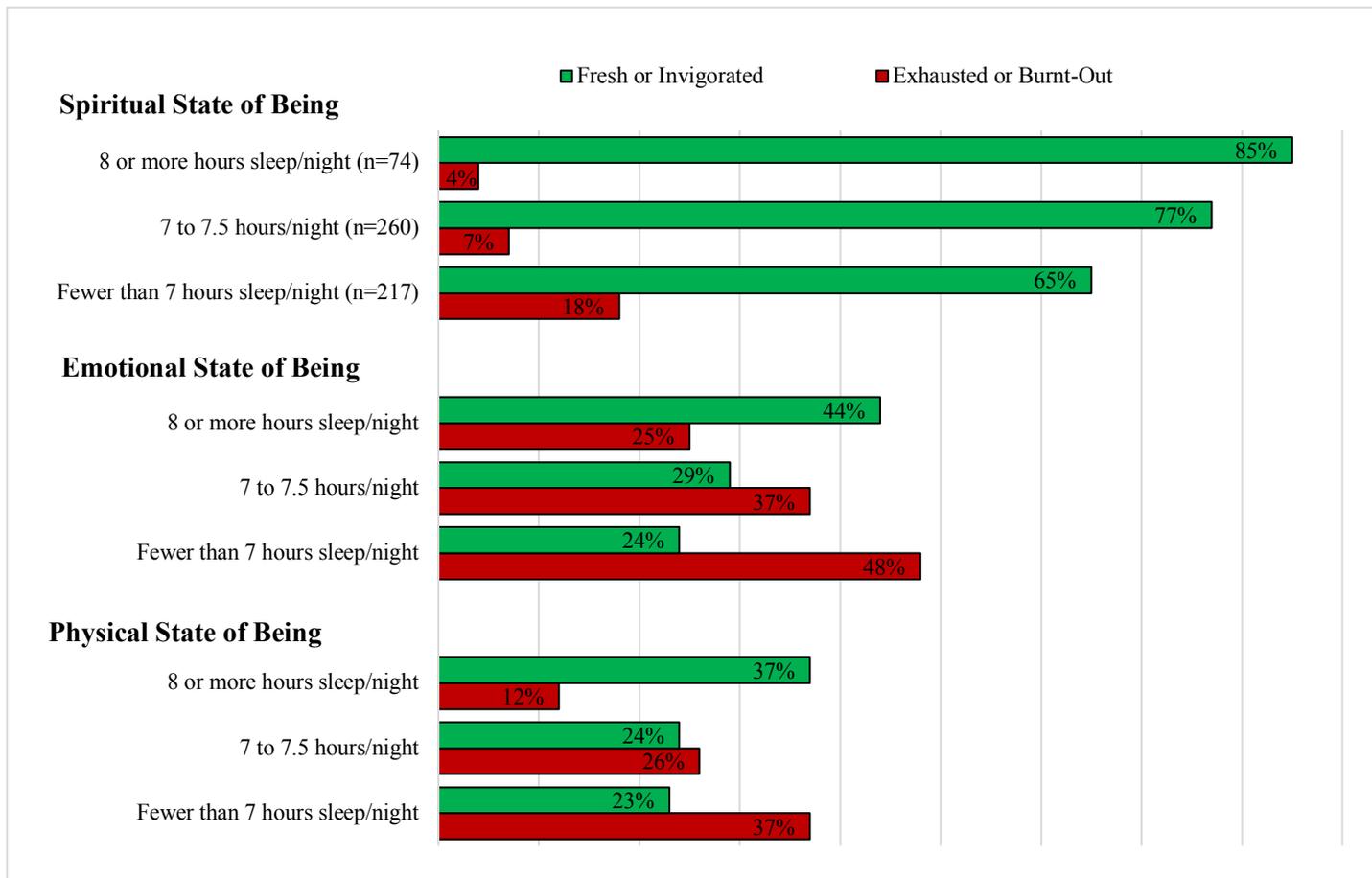


Figure 23: Frequency of support and perceptions about being at camp (Post-summer), n=547

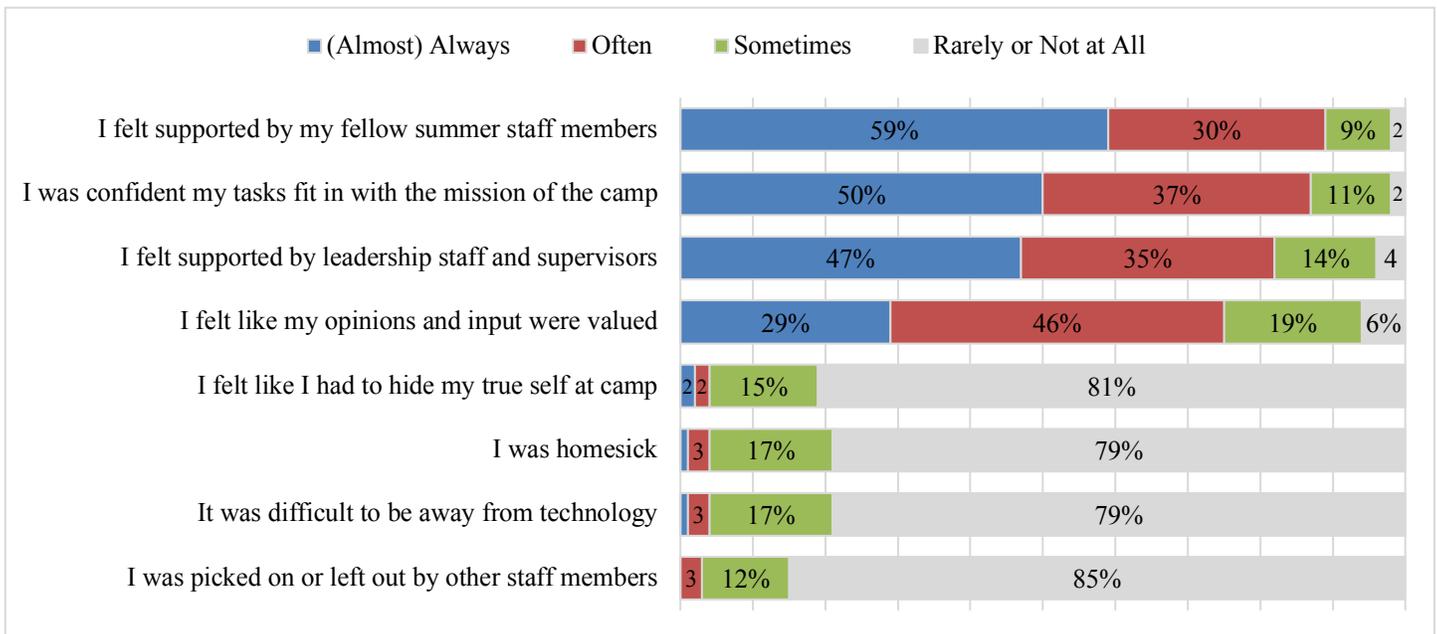
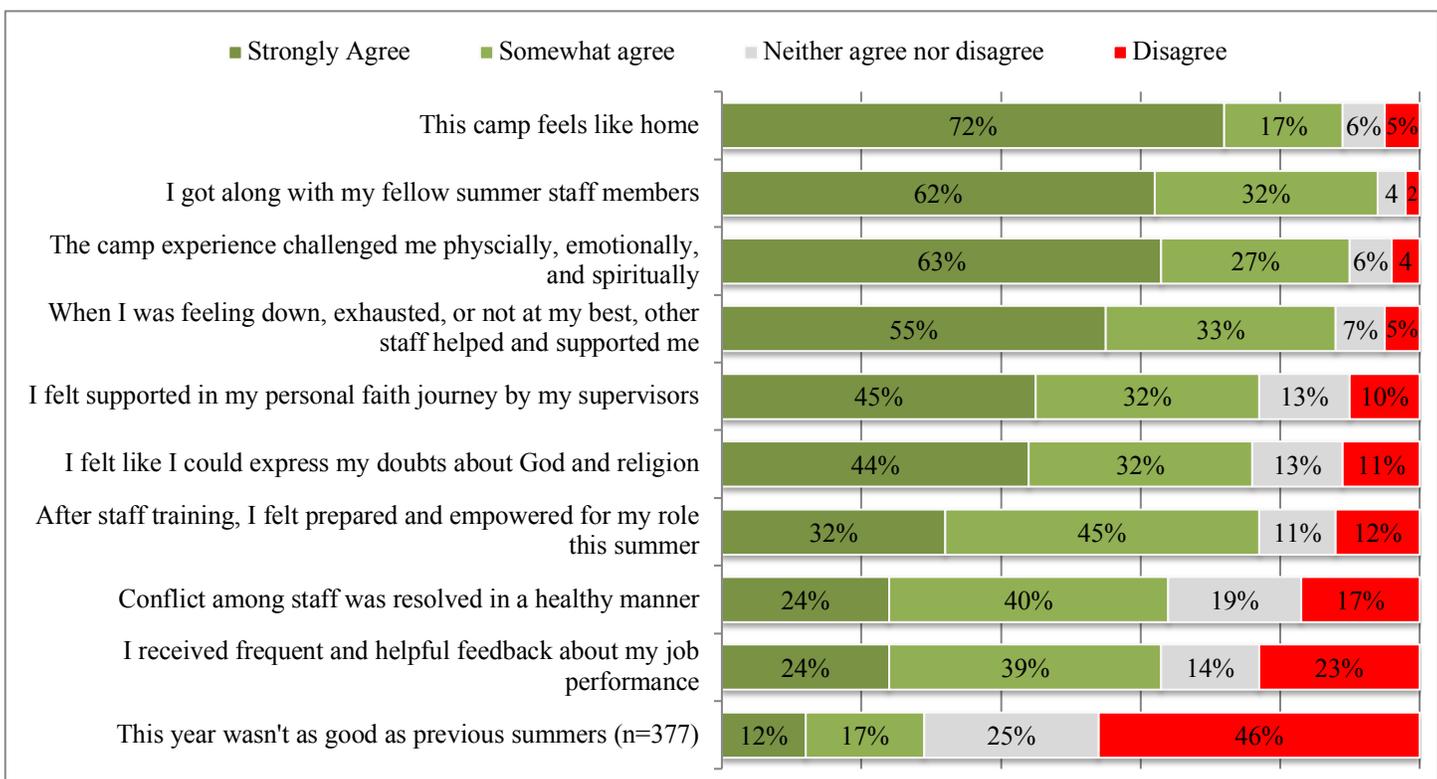
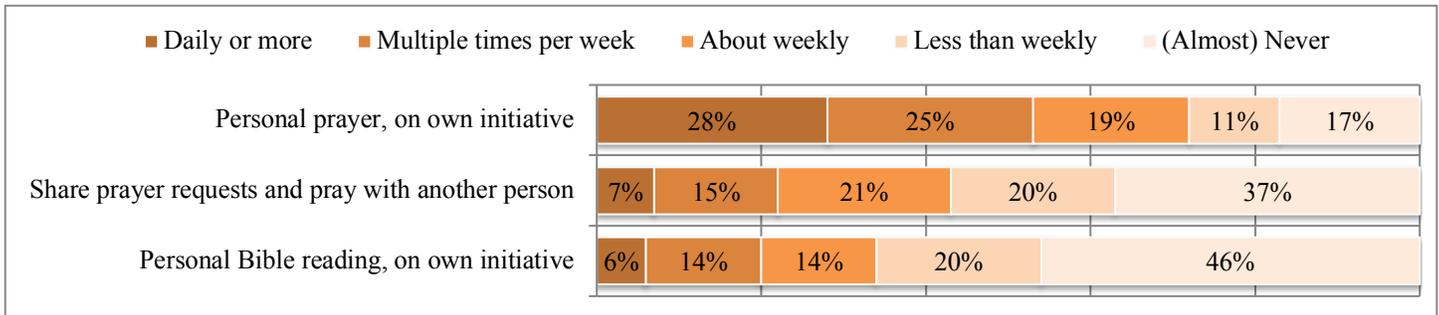


Figure 24: Summer Staff Experiences during Summer 2021 (Post-summer), n=543



- Those who indicated feeling exhausted/draind or burnt out at the end of the summer were compared with the rest of staff members on all answers shown in the above two figures. There were significant differences in 17 of the 18 survey items (the only exception was reported difficulty being away from technology). In each case, those reporting exhaustion or burn-out also reported more negative experiences, on average. For example, 53% agreed that they received frequent and helpful feedback about their job performance, compared with 73% of those who did not report exhaustion or burn-out. Additionally, 28% said they had to hide their true selves at camp at least sometimes, compared with just 11% who did not report exhaustion or burn-out.

Figure 25: Frequency of Religious Practices During the Summer (post-summer), n=542



- During the summer, personal faith practices increased only modestly, suggesting that they were not promoted in a systematic way at most camps. Looking only at the 480 staff members who completed both surveys, those who read their Bible on their own at least several times per week only increased from 14% to 19%. Equally modest was the increase in those who prayed daily or more, from 22% before camp to 27% during the summer.

At the end of the summer, only **76%** of staff members agreed that they were strengthened in their personal faith.

Staff Mental Health During the Summer

Anxiety: 85% of responding summer staff reported feeling “**overwhelming anxiety**” at least once or twice during the summer. This included almost half (48%) that had these feelings more than monthly and **25%** that had these feelings **weekly or more**.

Feeling down or hopeless: 71% of responding summer staff reported feeling “**very down or hopeless**” at least once or twice during the summer. This included 26% that had these feelings more than monthly and **7%** that had these feelings **weekly or more**.

Thoughts of self-harm: 16% of responding summer staff reported having “**thoughts of self-harm**” at least one or twice during the summer. This included **7%** that had these thoughts **monthly or more**.

EVERY CAMP that participated in the end-of-summer survey (n=42) had at least one staff member who reported having thoughts of self-harm during the summer, and all but two of these camps had multiple respondents report this.

Of those respondents who reported having thoughts of self-harm during the summer (n=86), most (82%) had reported having thoughts of self-harm on the pre-summer survey. This left 18% who had not previously in 2021 had thoughts of self-harm. There were additional patterns in the pre-summer survey among those reporting thoughts of self-harm during the summer. At the beginning of the summer, 57% of these respondents agreed, “I am often unhappy about my life and who I am.”

Of those who reported having thoughts of self-harm prior to the summer, over half (53%) reported not having any of these thoughts during the summer.

Table 2: Difference in Experience, Based on Pre-Summer Indicators of Mental Health Challenges

	All Staff	No indicators	1-2 indicators	3-4 indicators
% primarily served as counseling staff	65%	69%	64%	61%
Got less than 7 hours of sleep per night, on average	38%	31%	40%	43%
Physically exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	28%	20%	29%	37%
Emotionally exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	41%	29%	46%	48%
Spiritually exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	11%	5%	13%	15%
Exhausted or burnt out in at least 1 of 3 categories	53%	38%	56%	66%
Perceived support at camp				
I felt supported by leadership/supervisors <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	82%	92%	80%	74%
I felt supported by my fellow staff members <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	89%	93%	91%	84%
I was homesick <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	4%	3%	2%	8%
I felt like my opinions and input were valued <i>often/always</i>	75%	86%	75%	62%
I felt like I had to hide my true self at least <i>sometimes</i>	19%	14%	15%	30%
I was picked on or left out at least <i>sometimes</i>	15%	13%	12%	21%
Agreed: Conflict among staff was resolved in a healthy manner	64%	71%	65%	57%
Perceived Impacts				
Agree: I was strengthened in my personal faith	76%	83%	76%	67%
Agree: I feel more confident in myself since the beginning of the summer	86%	87%	89%	80%
Agree: I grew in my leadership abilities	95%	97%	97%	89%
Agree: The camp experience this summer has had a significant impact on my life	92%	93%	92%	91%
Agree: My experiences at camp have given me greater clarity on my life direction and career	72%	73%	74%	67%
Agree: I am currently finding good balance in my life between relationships, school, job, etc.	68%	78%	72%	52%
Agree: I am currently feeling overextended and involved in too many things	31%	18%	31%	43%
Agree: I am unsure what I want to do for a career	35%	35%	31%	42%
Indicators of Mental Health Challenges (summer)				
Felt overwhelming anxiety several times a month or more	49%	19%	56%	72%
Felt very down or hopeless several times a month or more	26%	9%	22%	49%
Had thoughts of self-harm at least once during the summer	17%	1%	11%	43%
Agree: I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am	29%	7%	22%	62%

- It is clear from the above table that staff who came into the summer with mental health challenges were very likely to experience persistence of those challenges during the summer. It is also apparent that these staff were much more likely to experience burn-out or exhaustion.
- Assuming that fellow staff and supervisors provided a similar level of care to all staff, it is clear that this method was not effective in caring for staff members who came in with mental health challenges. The more indicators of mental health challenges an incoming staff member had, the less likely they were to feel supported by their supervisors and feel like their opinions/input were valued.
- Though the experience was predominantly positive for all staff members, those with more mental health challenges were less likely to report positive outcomes.

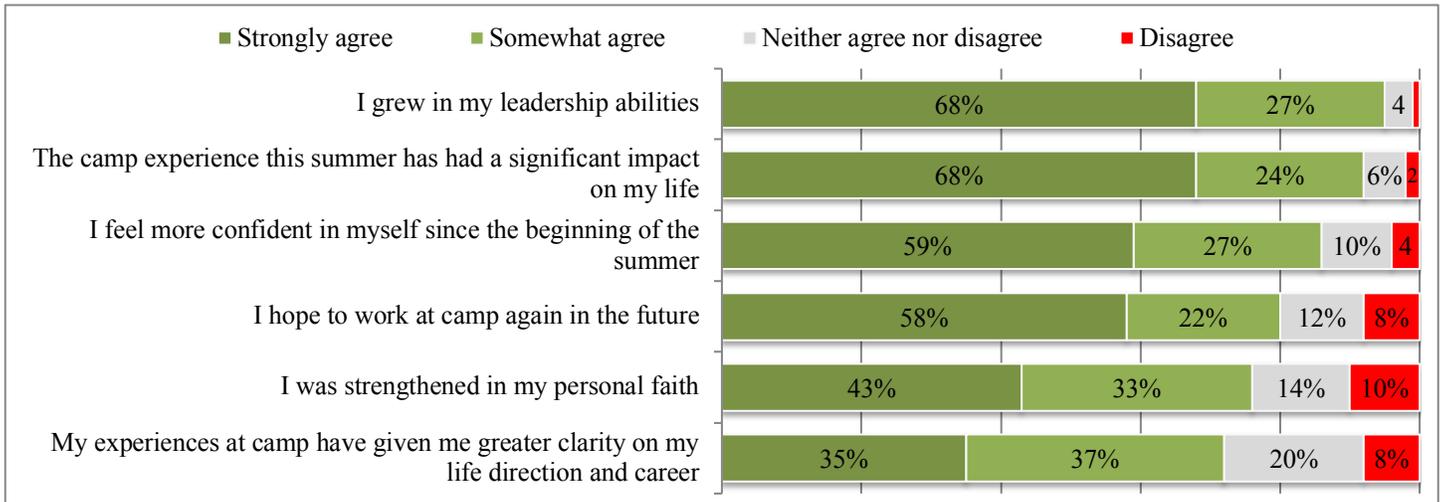
Table 3: Difference in Camp Experience, Based on Pre-Summer Indicators of Faith Commitment

	All Staff	Highly committed	Un-committed
% primarily served as counseling staff	65%	68%	62%
% primarily served as support staff or activity staff	17%	12%	23%
Got less than 7 hours of sleep per night, on average	38%	39%	41%
Physically exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	28%	25%	37%
Emotionally exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	41%	39%	47%
Spiritually exhausted or burnt out at end of summer	11%	9%	18%
Exhausted or burnt out in at least 1 of 3 categories	53%	50%	66%
Perceived support at camp			
I felt supported by leadership/supervisors <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	82%	83%	81%
I felt supported by my fellow staff members <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	89%	91%	86%
I was homesick <i>often</i> or <i>always</i>	4%	4%	3%
I felt like my opinions and input were valued <i>often/always</i>	75%	77%	74%
I felt like I had to hide my true self at least <i>sometimes</i>	19%	16%	25%
I was picked on or left out at least <i>sometimes</i>	15%	13%	19%
Agreed: Conflict among staff was resolved in a healthy manner	64%	66%	62%
Perceived Impacts			
Agree: I was strengthened in my personal faith	76%	85%	54%
Agree: I feel more confident in myself since the beginning of the summer	86%	90%	78%
Agree: I grew in my leadership abilities	95%	95%	93%
Agree: The camp experience this summer has had a significant impact on my life	92%	94%	87%
Agree: My experiences at camp have given me greater clarity on my life direction and career	72%	75%	67%
Agree: I am currently finding good balance in my life between relationships, school, job, etc.	68%	73%	58%
Agree: I am currently feeling overextended and involved in too many things	31%	30%	29%
Agree: I am unsure what I want to do for a career	35%	33%	42%
Indicators of Mental Health Challenges (summer)			
Felt overwhelming anxiety several times a month or more	49%	47%	55%
Felt very down or hopeless several times a month or more	26%	22%	32%
Had thoughts of self-harm at least once during the summer	17%	13%	21%
Agree: I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am	29%	24%	37%

- The staff experience varied by the faith commitment of the incoming staff members. In general, those who were committed Christians had a more positive staff experience than those who were uncommitted. However, the differences in experience were not in every category.
- Staff members reported very similar levels of support, regardless of their faith commitment. They felt supported by their supervisors and felt like their opinions/input were valued.
- The perceived support, however, did not overcome the difference in experience. Those with lower faith commitment were more likely to feel exhausted or burnt out at the end of the summer. They were much less likely to report finding overall balance in their lives. They had a higher rate of feeling hopeless and having thoughts of self-harm. While they reported equally that they grew in leadership abilities, they were much less likely to report growing in their faith or self-confidence.

THE IMPACTS OF WORKING ON SUMMER STAFF

Figure 26: Perceptions of the impacts of working on summer staff (post-summer), n=541



- A large majority of staff members clearly indicated that their experience working on summer staff impacted them in multiple ways, including 92% agreeing that the camp experience had a significant impact on their lives.

To get a better idea of staff outcomes, we had staff members answer 28 identical questions on the pre-summer and post-summer surveys. Comparing their responses to these questions offers an indication of the specific areas they showed growth. This is done in Tables 1-3. For each item, only staff members who responded on both surveys are included. The average of their responses on the pre-summer survey (T1) is compared with that of the post-summer survey (T2). Average responses in Tables 1 and 2 are on a 5-point agreement scale (with 5 being “strongly agree”) and those in Table 3 are on a 6-point positivity scale (with 6 being “very positive”).

Table 4: Faith Commitment Outcomes

	<i>n</i>	T1 mean	T2 mean	DM T2-T1
Faith relevance				
Faith in God helps me in my daily life	459	3.85	3.90	.050
I have important things to offer the church and the world	467	4.30	4.30	.004
I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need	464	4.05	4.13	.086
Congregational Connection				
The Christian Church is a force for good in the world	450	3.59	3.59	.002
I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church	421	2.88	3.11	.223***
5 years from now, I plan to be active in a Christian church/congregation	410	4.00	4.01	.017
Regular worship attendance is important for my faith	461	3.11	3.12	.011
Belief/Theology				
God created the world	450	4.31	4.25	-.062
The Holy Spirit is active in the world	448	4.36	4.34	-.013
The Bible is the word of God	449	3.73	3.59	-.140**
We earn God’s love and forgiveness by doing good things	453	2.06	1.96	-.099
I believe that Jesus rose from the dead	438	4.35	4.33	-.021
I have a good understanding of Lutheran theology	455	3.60	3.82	.215***

Asterisks denote that an item was statistically significant at **p*<.05 (moderate), ***p*<.01 (strong), or ****p*<.001 (very strong).

- Questions related to faith showed very little change from the beginning of summer to the end of summer, when considering all respondents. This was in spite of there being a great deal of room for change in the 5-point Likert scale from the starting values. For example, at the beginning of camp, only 39% of respondents strongly agreed, “Faith in God helps me in my daily life,” meaning well over half had the potential to grow on the scale provided. However, at the end of camp, the agreement level stayed statistically constant, with only a slight increase in agreement (40% strongly agreed). In fact, 10 of the 13 faith-related items showed no significant change from the first day to the last day of camp.
- Two of the three faith-related items that changed significantly showed overall *decline*. These two items were “The Bible is the word of God” and “I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church.” In the latter case, agreement increased during the summer, indicating that regard for the organized church decreased among staff members. Notice that agreement with the related item “Regular worship attendance is important for my faith” remained remarkably low before and after the summer, with less than half of respondents even somewhat agreeing in both surveys. In the case of “The Bible is the word of God,” average agreement declined during the summer, even though fewer than two-thirds of staff agreed with the statement at the beginning of the summer. Taken together, these changes indicate a concerning trajectory from the perspective of Christian theology. They indicate a decline in dependence on the two most important conveyers of the Christian faith: the church and the Bible.
- Interestingly, the only faith-related item that showed significant positive growth was agreement with “I have a good understanding of Lutheran theology.” This growth is perplexing, given the other changes noted above. The Bible as the written word of God is central to Lutheran theology, so eroding dependence on the Bible as a source of faith would seem inconsistent with a growth in understanding of Lutheran theology.

Table 5: Confidence, Character, and Life Direction Outcomes

	<i>n</i>	T1 mean	T2 mean	DM T2-T1
I like going out of my comfort zone and trying new things	472	3.93	4.06	.131**
Oftentimes, my actions do not align with my beliefs	457	2.53	2.45	-.088
I am good at solving problems with a team of people	477	4.39	4.43	.048
When something bad or frustrating happens, I have trouble bouncing back and finding joy	475	2.76	2.69	-.067
I feel confident in my ability to be a leader	473	4.33	4.49	.165***
I know that I can make friends	472	4.50	4.52	.019
I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am	472	2.69	2.63	-.064
I am currently feeling overextended and involved in too many things	474	2.84	2.83	-.004
I am currently finding good balance in my life between relationships, school, job, etc.	467	3.66	3.74	.079
I am unsure what I want to do for a career	483	2.72	2.72	.006
I plan to work full-time in a congregation or other Christian ministry	428	2.08	2.07	-.009
I think God is calling me to professional ministry	424	2.32	2.25	-.071

*Notations denote that an item was statistically significant at * $p < .05$ (moderate), ** $p < .01$ (strong), or $p < .001$ (very strong)*

- As with faith and congregation connection, items related to confidence, character, and life direction showed little change during the summer. Once again, the lack of growth cannot be explained by simply noting high responses on the first survey. For example, agreement with “I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am” was quite high at the beginning of the summer. A positive, impactful camp experience should be expected to significantly change this agreement level by the end of the summer, but the small change observed was non-significant.

- Only two of the above items showed significant change. The item that showed the most consistent and greatest change during the summer was, “I feel confident in my ability to be a leader.” This confirms the respondents’ self-assessment from the end-of-summer survey, when 95% agreed that they grew in their leadership abilities, more than any other outcome. The other item showing growth was “I like going out of my comfort zone and trying new things.” Again, this confirms the end-of-summer survey responses, in which 86% of staff agreed that they grew in their self-confidence.

Table 6: Staff Changes in Perceptions of their Camp and the Church

	<i>n</i>	T1 mean	T2 mean	DM T2-T1
Impressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	423	5.09	4.94	-.144***
Impressions of Christianity, in general	467	4.48	4.40	-.075*
Impressions of THIS CAMP	485	5.72	5.46	-.262***

*Notations denote that an item was statistically significant at * $p < .05$ (moderate), ** $p < .01$ (strong), or $p < .001$ (very strong)*

- Respondent perceptions of their camp and the church declined during the course of the summer. The decline was largest in relation to the camp, an observation presumably related to negative experiences during the summer. Notice that perceptions of the camp were extremely high at the beginning of the summer. This is unsurprising, considering respondents had chosen to spend their summer working there. The decline makes clear that, for a sizeable minority of respondents, the experience did not match their expectations.
- Respondents also ended the summer with less positive impressions of both the ELCA and Christianity, in general. This corroborates the finding above, in which respondents increased in agreement with the statement, “I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church.” Overall, staff members left camp with a lower regard for the organized Christian faith than they had when the summer began. Respondents detailed these perceptions in the open-ended comments. For example, one said, “Faith in God can exist in community with others, in nature, or anywhere. It doesn't have to exist in an organized church.” Another said, “Difference is ok and theology is varied and God is good, even when the church is bad.” These and other responses indicate an understanding that God can be found outside of the church building and that organized religion does not have all the answers. An unintended consequence of these mature understandings seems to be increased aversion to organized religion, in general, rather than specific abuses.

Factors that Impacted Staff Outcomes

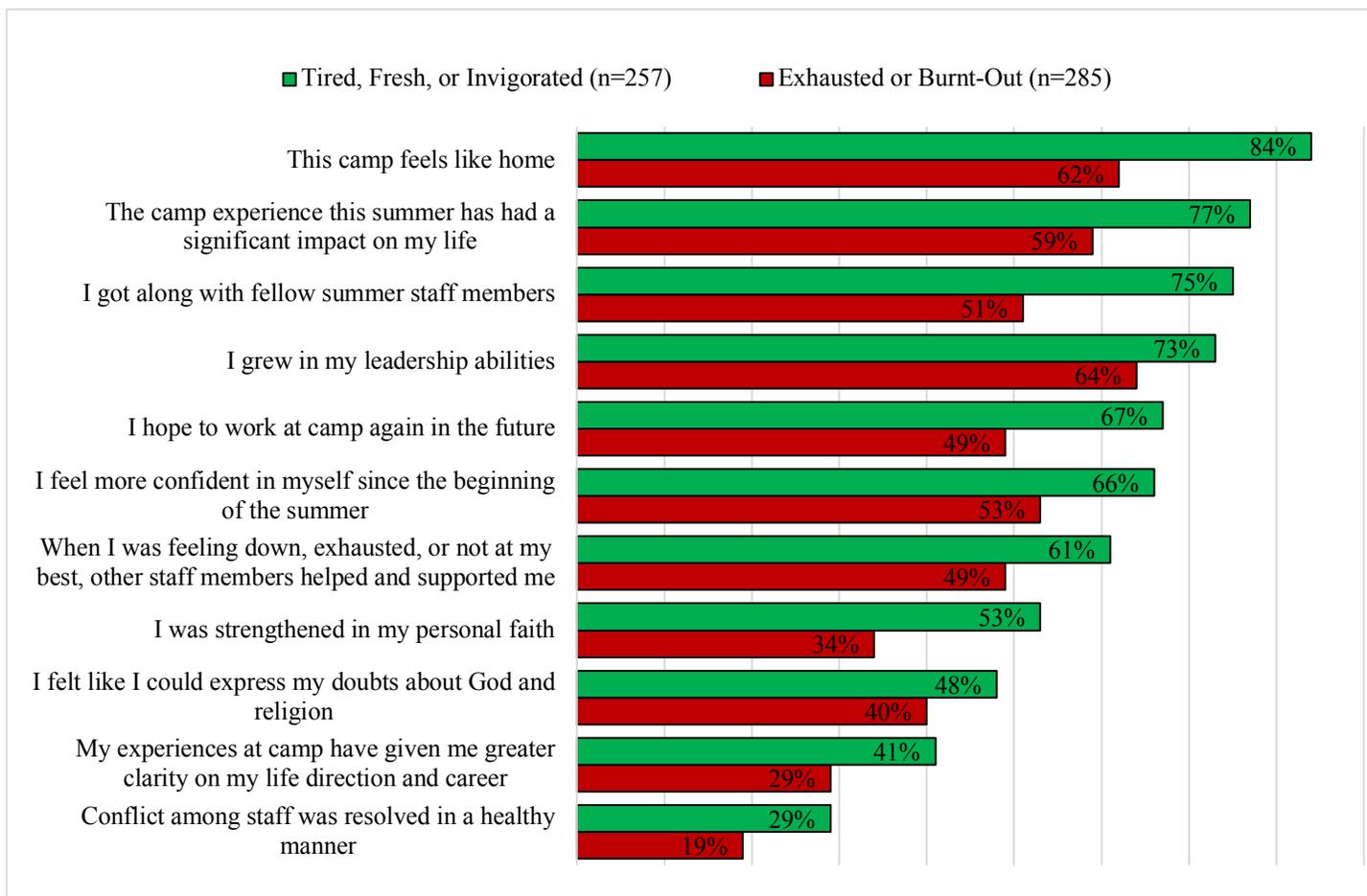
- **Variables Correlated with Growth:** Six questions on the post-summer survey asked directly about staff growth during the summer. These are shown above. There were multiple variables that had a significant positive correlation with all 6 of these growth variables. These are listed below in descending order of the strength of average correlation with the six growth variables (most significant at top):
 - When I was feeling down, exhausted, or not at my best, other staff members helped and supported me (.337)
 - I felt supported by my fellow summer staff members (.330)
 - I felt supported in my personal faith journey by my supervisors (.322)
 - I felt like my opinions and input were valued (.314)
 - I was confident that my specific tasks fit in with the mission of the camp (.295)

- I felt supported by leadership staff and supervisors (.289)
- I got along with my fellow summer staff members (.265)
- I received frequent and helpful feedback about my job performance (.257)
- Conflict among staff was resolved in a healthy manner (.254)
- I felt like I had to hide my true self at camp (negatively correlated) (-.247)
- After staff training, I felt prepared and empowered for my role at camp (.239)
- I felt like I could express my doubts about God and religion (.234)
- The camp experience challenged me physically, emotionally, and spiritually (.208)
- I was picked on or left out by fellow staff members (negatively correlated) (-.189)

From this list, there appear to be three major themes related to staff growth. The most significant (related to the top 3 items) is **support**. Staff members perceived growth when they felt supported by leadership and fellow staff members. Second (related to the next two items) is **agency**. Staff members perceived growth when they felt like they mattered, were valued, and contributed meaningfully. Third is **conflict resolution**. Staff perceived more growth when they got along with fellow staff and conflicts were resolved in a healthy manner. Less significant, though still important, were **training** and **healthy staff atmosphere** (free to express doubt, be one's self, and not be picked on or left out).

- **Exhaustion/Burn-Out**: Exhaustion or burn-out at the end of the summer had a significant negative correlation with several staff outcomes.
 - **Decline in self-confidence**: The clearest differences were in survey items related to self-confidence and resilience. While those who did not indicate that they were exhausted or burnt-out at the end of the summer showed a significant *decline* in agreement with “I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am,” those who indicated exhaustion/burnt-out actually *increased* in agreement with this statement. The same was true for “When something bad or frustrating happens, I have trouble bouncing back and finding joy” and “Oftentimes, my actions do not align with my beliefs.” Taken together, these items are related to negative self-perception.
 - **Decline in regard for the church**: Those indicating exhaustion/burn-out showed a significant decrease in their perceptions of the ELCA and the Christian church, in general, while those not indicating exhaustion/burn-out did not change significantly in their perceptions. Additionally, those indicating exhaustion/burn-out declined significantly in their agreement with the statement, “I plan to work full-time in a congregation or other Christian ministry,” while those not indicating exhaustion/burn-out increased in their agreement with this statement. Together, these findings indicate that the staff experience directly affected perceptions of the church and call to ministry.

Figure 27: Impact of End-of-Summer Exhaustion/Burn-out on Staff Perceptions (% indicate "Strongly Agree")



Impacts on Call to Ministry and Church Leadership

One of the primary goals of the Camp and Church Leadership Project was to assess the impacts of working on summer camp staff on church leadership. Prior phases of the project clearly demonstrated that the summer staff experience impacted the faith formation and call stories of many leaders in the church, including ordained ministers. The summer staff survey revealed a complex picture. On the one hand, leadership abilities and confidence showed the most significant growth of any outcome measured. 95% of respondents agreed, “I grew in my leadership abilities,” and agreement with “I feel confident in my ability to be a leader” showed the most consistent growth of any item from the beginning to the end of summer. On the other hand, regard for the organized church and congregational ministry tended to decline over the course of the summer. This suggests that the camp experience prepared many staff members for leadership, though not necessarily leadership in the church.

The survey also included several items designed to address discernment and, more specifically, call to ministry or church leadership. These items were:

- I plan to work full-time in a congregation or other Christian ministry
- I think God is calling me to professional ministry

Neither of these items showed significant change from the first day to the last day when all respondents were considered. However, just because there was not widespread change does not mean there was not individual change.

There were 490 individuals who answered one or both of the latter two items at the beginning and end of the summer. Of these, 70 individuals (14%) showed growth in their sense of call to professional ministry and/or full-time congregational work. About half of them (8%) moved from disagreement with both of the statements to being unsure (or neither agreeing nor disagreeing). The other half (6%) moved from disagreement or a state of being unsure to agreement with one or both of the statements. The evidence suggests the first group entered a state of consideration of ministry during the camp experience, while the second group received a sense of call to ministry during the summer. These 70 individuals were spread across 31 different camps. There were few markers to set aside the experience of these individuals from their peers who did not show increase in their call to ministry.

Additionally, there were 80 individuals (16%) that agreed with one or more of the statements on both surveys, indicating they entered the summer with a sense of call and the call was affirmed during their experience. There were also some individuals (4%) who entered the summer agreeing with one or more of the call statements and, by the end of the summer, either were unsure or disagreed. This latter group evidently discerned during the summer that they were not called to ministry (or at least entered a state of questioning their call). The remaining respondents were those that disagreed with both statements both before and after the summer (53%) and those who were unsure on both surveys (12%).

Over a third of respondents (37%) started the summer agreeing with, “I am unsure what I want to do for a career.” Interestingly, this was not significantly correlated with age. In fact, those over 20 years old were slightly more likely to agree with the statement (40%) compared with those under 20 (36%). At the end of the summer, agreement with this statement was largely unchanged. Some went from disagreement to agreement, while others went from agreement to disagreement, but the majority showed no change. This highlights that emerging adulthood is an unsettled time of life. The summer camp experience provided clarity for some staff members, while it put the future plans of others in question.

It is clear that the experience was highly effective in developing leadership among the summer staff members, and a small group of them determined by the end of the summer to use their gifts in professional ministry, whether in the organized church or outside of it.

Demographic Differences in Outcomes

Differences Among Males and Females

There were several disparities between male and female staff members. Females were significantly more likely than males to agree with:

- I was picked on or left out by other staff members
- I was homesick
- The camp experience challenged me physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- The camp experience this summer has had a significant impact on my life

Males reported getting significantly more sleep, on average, than females.

Females were more likely to report feeling exhausted or burnt out at the end of the summer.

Females were more likely to show evidence for growth in self-confidence than males.

Differences between LGBTQIA+ staff and others

LGBTQIA+ staff were significantly different from their fellow staff members in their responses to several items. LGBTQIA+ staff agreed significantly more with:

- I felt like I had to hide my true self at camp

LGBTQIA+ staff agreed significantly less with:

- I felt supported by leadership staff and supervisors
- I got along with my fellow summer staff members
- I am currently finding good balance in my life between relationships, school, job, etc.

At the end of the summer, LGBTQIA+ staff reported having much more frequent feelings of overwhelming anxiety (61% several times a month or more), feeling very down or hopeless (37% several times a month or more), and having thoughts of self-harm (15% monthly or more) compared with their fellow staff members.

Major Factors Impacting Staff Growth

There were two major factors within the camp community that clearly impacted staff outcomes. These were having a strong faith community and having a supportive community.

Factor 1: A Community of Faith

Not every incoming staff member had a strong faith commitment. In fact, a large minority of staff members had a low level of faith commitment, defined as not agreeing with basic tenets of the Christian faith and not agreeing with selected statements of the importance of faith in life. The prevalence of these staff members within a staff community varied from camp to camp. Among responding camps, about two-thirds (65%) had a staff in which the majority were highly committed Christians. The remaining third of camps (35%) had only a minority of highly committed Christians, with the others having a low or moderate faith commitment. The differences between these two groups of camps reveals the importance of hiring staff who are already committed Christians. This creates a community of faith that nurtures faith among all staff members.

Table 7: Faith Practices During the Summer:

	Majority of staff committed Christians	Minority of staff committed Christians
Personal prayer , on their own initiative, multiple times per week or more	60%	39%
Personal Bible reading , on their own initiative, multiple times per week or more	27%	9%
Pray with prayer partner multiple times per week or more	27%	12%

Differences in Reported Outcomes

Reported outcomes were similar between respondents from these two groups of camps, especially related to getting along with fellow staff and growing in leadership. However, respondents who were part of a staff that was majority highly committed Christians were significantly more likely to report being strengthened in their personal faith, that the experience gave them greater clarity on their life direction/career, and that they were finding good balance in their lives at the end of the summer. The measured growth from the pre-summer survey to the post-summer survey revealed the largest differences, particularly related to faith.

Belief and Theology

In terms of belief and theology, the greatest difference was in agreement with “The Bible is the word of God.” Those working on staffs that were minority committed Christians *declined* significantly in their agreement ($p < .001$), while those working on staffs that were majority committed Christians showed no significant change in agreement. Those working on staffs that were majority committed Christians showed significant increase in agreement with “I have a good understanding of Lutheran theology” ($p < .001$) along with a corresponding significant decrease in agreement with “We earn God’s love and forgiveness by doing good things” ($p < .05$). Those working at minority committed Christian camps showed no significant change in either of these measurements. Additionally, those at minority committed Christian camps showed a decrease (non-significant) in agreement with “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead,” while those at majority committed Christian camps showed an increase (non-significant) in agreement. It is notable that, in the case of the latter variable, agreement among staff at minority committed Christian camps at the end of the summer was only 68%, compared with 88% at majority committed Christian camps. By the end of the summer at camps that had minority committed Christian staffs, less than half (only 43%) agreed that the Bible is the word of God and barely two-thirds agreed that they believe Jesus rose from the dead.

Congregational Connection

The differences between the two types of camp staff were most apparent in their regard for the Christian church and congregational ministry. Both groups increased in their agreement with “I oftentimes think that Christianity would be better off without an organized church.” However, changes varied widely in the less philosophical statements. Respondents who worked on staffs that were minority committed Christians *declined* significantly in their agreement with “The Christian Church is a force for good in the world” ($p < .01$) and also declined (non-significant) in agreement with “Regular worship attendance is important for my faith.” On the other hand, respondents working at camps with majority committed Christians on staff *increased* significantly in agreement with the first statement ($p < .05$) and also increased (non-significant) in agreement with the second. At the end of the summer, only 23% of those who worked at minority committed Christian camps agreed that regular worship attendance was important for their faith and only 39% agreed that the Christian Church is a force for good in the world, compared with 55% and 66%, respectively, of those who worked on staffs that were majority committed Christian.

Impacts on the Uncommitted

As noted above, roughly a quarter (23%) of incoming staff members were categorized as “uncommitted Christians,” since they had moderately low or low levels of both belief and understanding that faith was relevant in their lives. These uncommitted staff members were distributed almost evenly between camps that had minority (56%) and majority (44%) committed staff members. It is possible, therefore, to compare the impacts of these staff members based on the faith commitment of their camp community. The results were predictable. Almost two-thirds (63%) of those working at majority committed Christian camps agreed at the end of the summer that they were strengthened in their faith, compared with less than half (47%) of those working at minority committed Christian camps. In the individual measurements, those at majority committed Christian camps increased significantly in both their belief in God and their understanding that faith matters in life, including significant increases in agreement with “Faith in God helps me in my daily life” ($p < .01$), “I have Christian friends I can turn to in times of need” ($p < .001$), “5 years from now, I plan to be active in a Christian church/congregation” ($p < .01$), “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead” ($p < .05$), and “I have a good understanding of Lutheran theology” ($p < .01$). In contrast, those who worked at camps with a minority of committed Christians had no significant change in any of these except “Faith in God helps me in my daily life,” which showed modest but significant growth ($p < .05$).

Impacts on the Committed

The impacts on the highly committed Christians were exactly opposite of the uncommitted. Those who arrived at camp with high levels of belief and faith relevance tended to decline in both if they were embedded in a staff community in which committed Christians were in the minority. They declined significantly in their agreement with “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead” ($p < .05$), “The Bible is the word of God” ($p < .01$), “The Christian Church is a force for good in the world” ($p < .05$), and “I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need” ($p < .05$). In contrast, the highly committed Christians who worked on staff with majority committed Christians tended to maintain their very high levels of belief and faith relevance. At the end of the summer, 89% of those on majority committed Christian staffs agreed that they were strengthened in their personal faith, compared with only 72% of those on minority committed Christian staffs.

Factor 2: A Supportive Community

Of the many post-summer survey variables positively correlated with staff growth, the most significant were related to support received at camp and perceived agency of the respondent. Four of these variables combined to form a basic index assessing perceived support and agency. These included:

- When I was feeling down, exhausted, or not at my best, other staff members helped and supported me

- I felt supported by leadership staff and supervisors
- I felt like my opinions and input were valued
- I was confident that my specific tasks fit in with the mission of the camp

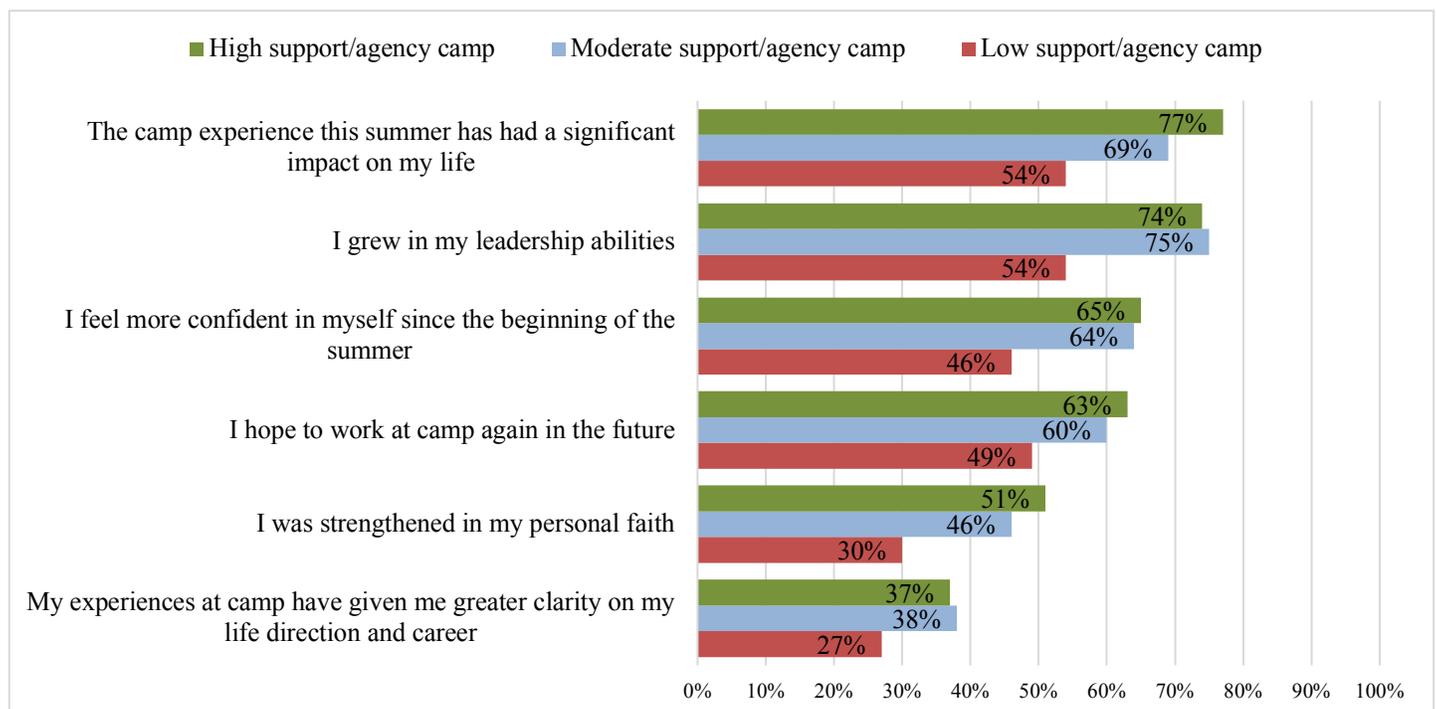
Each respondent’s average agreement level with these four statements was calculated to produce the index on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The overall average from all respondents was 4.22 and the median was 4.25. Respondents were then divided according to their camp, and the average agreement of all staff from each camp was calculated and compared with the central tendencies of all staff. Camps within 0.1 of the central tendency were categorized as “moderate support/agency” (10 camps). Those lower than this (< 4.12) were categorized as “low support/agency” (15 camps), and those with a higher average (> 4.32) were categorized as “high support/agency” (17 camps). This method divided the post-summer survey respondents roughly into thirds (29% low, 32% moderate, 39% high). Staff outcomes were then individually assessed based on the categories of support/agency experienced in the camp as a whole.

Staff who worked at camps with higher levels of support/agency reported significantly less frequent feelings of overwhelming anxiety, feeling very down or hopeless, and having thoughts of self-harm. At the end of the summer, staff working at camps with low levels of support/agency were 1.4 times more likely to be physically exhausted/burnt out, 2.3 times more likely to be emotionally exhausted/burnt out, and 3.8 times more likely to be spiritually exhausted/burnt out compared with staff at camps with high support/agency.

Staff who worked at camps with higher levels of support/agency were much more likely to agree that they were strengthened in their faith, grew in leadership abilities, felt more confident in themselves, and that the camp experience had a significant impact on their lives.

Looking at the individual growth variables is revealing. Staff who worked at camps categorized as having low levels of support/agency were the only subgroup measured that did not show significant growth in “I feel confident in my ability to be a leader.” They showed slight (non-significant) *increases* in agreement with “I am oftentimes unhappy about my life and who I am” and “When something bad or frustrating happens, I have trouble bouncing back and finding joy.” For the most part, they showed a pattern of non-growth, whereas those working at camps categorized as having high levels of support/agency had significant positive growth in multiple variables.

Figure 28: Perceptions of Personal Growth, based on average support/agency at camp (% strongly agree)



Staff Perceptions of Camp Takeaways

The post-camp survey included an open-ended question asking outgoing staff members the most important thing they would take away from their summer working at camp. A total of 458 staff members answered this question. There were major themes, including new or stronger relationships, self-confidence, life skills, and faith. However, the most striking theme of the open-ended comments was the diversity of responses. They were oftentimes very specific, and many were general statements of wisdom about life, appearing as a sort of proverb.

Theme 1: Trusted community and deep friendships

The most consistent takeaway that staff mentioned was building new friendships and strengthening relationships. Many respondents connected this to the theme of faith, indicating the importance of being in “intentional Christian community” or a community of faith. It is notable that almost half (47%) of staff indicated on the pre-summer survey that relational connection was the main thing they were hoping to gain from the summer of working at camp. It is not surprising, therefore, that this was also the most frequent takeaway. It is surprising, however, that only 26% of responding staff mentioned this as a takeaway. This is one indication that the outcomes of the summer staff experience were much broader than expectations going in. Closely related to the theme of community was teamwork. Many staff indicated that they learned how to work with others or solve problems as a team (6%). Additionally, 7% of respondents indicated that they learned deeper care for others and how to love those who were different from them. This included finding value in all people and recognizing that God calls us to love everyone. As one respondent said, “It’s important to know a person’s background before passing judgement. There is so much more to their story than you know.” Another respondent summarized their main takeaway: “It is okay to rely on others for help in times of need.” This latter response spoke to the theme of vulnerability. In the context of a trusted community, staff members learned how to rely on one another, recognize their shortcomings, and seek help from others.

Theme 2: Self-confidence and personal identity

The most prevalent theme related to personal impact was growth in self-confidence (14%). Respondents indicated that they grew in their understanding that they mattered and that they could make a difference in the world or in the lives of others. They became more confident in their personal gifts, and some discovered a sense of self-worth. Closely related was the theme of identity formation, with 5% of respondents indicating they grew in knowledge about themselves. For some, this led to a new understanding of their purpose in life (2%) or clarity on their life direction/vocation (2%). One respondent said they learned: “It is much more fun to be myself than to try and change myself.”

Theme 3: Recognizing God at work

“God” was the most frequent word respondents used in their open-ended comments at the end of the summer. Interestingly, only 10% specifically said that they grew in their faith. The more prevalent theme was recognizing God’s activity in the world, most especially in Christian community but also in nature and through circumstances. 9% of respondents said they grew in their understanding of God, theology, or the Christian church, and an additional 6% offered specific ways that they recognized God at work in their lives or the world. Some were simple proverbs about God’s activity, such as, “Be ready for God to work in your life and make space for the outcomes to be different than what you think” and “Energy and passion will never come from people of this world, but through Christ in them, so ground yourself in God.” A small number (2%) indicated growth in evangelism skills, such as learning how to share God’s love or the word of God with others.

Theme 4: Leadership skills

Aside from self-confidence, the most commonly referenced personal growth impact was leadership development (11% of respondents). In some cases, these two outcomes were connected, such as “confidence

that I can be a good leader.” Some respondents specified leadership skills like problem solving, communication, flexibility, and social skills, but most referenced leadership more generally. The experience itself was more important to most staff than specific skills they learned. In other words, they learned how to be a leader (or that they could be a good leader) through the experience of leading others (fellow staff or campers).

Theme 5: Working with children

A number of staff (7%) referenced the experience of working with children. Some connected this with a specific vocational path (particularly teaching), but others stated more generally that they learned how to work effectively with young people.

Theme 6: Endurance and resilience

Many respondents made clear that their experience on staff was challenging or even grueling. Some of these staff (5%) specifically indicated that they learned how to endure through hardship or how to be resilient in the face of challenge/adversity. Several respondents shared specific stories of difficulties during the summer, many of them related to staffing shortages and feeling overworked. Responses categorized in this theme had the general indication of viewing a very challenging summer in a positive light. One respondent said, “Even when you are physically and emotionally drained, you can find it in you to keep pushing forward.”

Negative lessons:

Not every respondent described their challenging summer in a positive light. Multiple staff members (3% of the total) described what they learned in negative terms. For example, one staff said, “That the role you are put in will never be what you wanted or was planning on. I constantly felt overwhelmed and overstimulated by having to take responsibility for others actions.” Another said, “The only people I can depend on are myself and God.” Another said, “The long, long hours and constantly-rising expectations regarding personal and team performance drove me to actual, no-joke desperation by the end. I have a hard time thinking positively about my experience or remembering it well, in that regard.”

Less common themes:

Several other themes accounted for less than 3% of responses. These included learning specific skills (such as canoeing), learning a love for the outdoors, finding a place of personal healing or peace, finding personal joy or happiness, finding a sense of fulfillment or accomplishment, and making money.