FINDINGS REPORT

SACR.PL/OMCDIRECTOR

DIRECTOR SURVEY 2024

OMC

PREPARED BY

SACRED PLAYGROUNDS

SPRING 2025

In This Report

Introduction and Items of Note	3
Ministry Site Overview	4
Congregational Connection	7
Threat Assessment	10
Camp/Retreat Center Directors	12
Summer Camp 2024 Overview	15
Summer Camp Enrollment	19
Summer Camp Fees	23
Summer Camp Staff	24
Retreats and Conferences	27
Ministry Center Philosophy	34

How to Use This Report

Share survey findings with your organization's camp directors.

Discuss key survey findings with your ministry center's staff or board of directors.

Compare your site's philosophy and statistical data with the larger camping network.

Introduction

The founders of Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC) committed themselves to research as one of several ministry priorities. The first director survey was conducted in 2014 as part of a grant-funded research initiative called The Confirmation Project and included four OMC organizations. Hoping to establish a benchmark survey of Mainline Christian camp and retreat ministries, OMC funded an expanded survey in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 including all of its member organizations. The 2024-25 survey represents the sixth bi-annual survey of Mainline camp and retreat ministries. With data from 6 surveys over a span of 11 years, we can observe trends in the data.

The six participating outdoor ministry associations, representing approximately 650 individual ministry centers, distributed the online survey to their members and affiliates, encouraging their responses through their communication channels. The survey opened in November 2024 and remained open until March 31, 2025 to facilitate a high response. The survey typically took a director 28 minutes to complete and had a completion rate of 78%. The 249 respondents represented 307 individual sites, for a response rate of approximately 47%.

This report presents survey responses in data tables, charts, and prose. In some cases, multiple survey responses are combined to form summary indices. Results are compared to previous years of OMC data to observe trends over time.

Items of Note

- OMC directors expressed more confidence and less burnout than in 2022. Some of the pressures of the post-pandemic camp and retreat industry had abated, particularly the shortage of staff. 60% of responding directors indicated they felt “fresh” or “energized,” compared with only 7% that felt exhausted or burnt out.
- Fundraising was generally up in 2024, especially among ministry centers with higher annual budgets, and clergy involvement in programming was up in comparison to 2022 survey data.
- Retreat/conference usage was generally higher in 2024 compared with the previous year, continuing the upward trend following the pandemic.
- Summer camp numbers were generally stagnant across the network. While 35% of camps reported higher enrollment in 2024, 26% reported lower enrollment (with the remainder about the same). Average overnight camp attendance remained roughly the same from 2022-2024. Only 15% of camps reported being at 90% capacity or higher in 2024. Day camp enrollment also showed little change from 2023 to 2024.
- The top priorities of camp directors remained constant: participant safety, fellowship/community building, and self-confidence/character building. Faith-related priorities were also consider ed highly important, though the trend toward lower emphasis on faith-related priorities continued in 2024-25, marking steady declines over the past decade.
- The top 3 threats that camp directors identified were site and infrastructure needs/challenges, rising costs (alongside other financial concerns), and persistent staffing challenges.

Ministry Site Overview

249 Outdoor Ministry organizations responded to the survey, representing **307 ministry sites.** They represented 49 U.S. states and 9 Canadian provinces and territories.

FIGURE 4A: # RESPONDING OUTDOOR MINISTRY ORGANIZATIONS, BY AFFILIATION

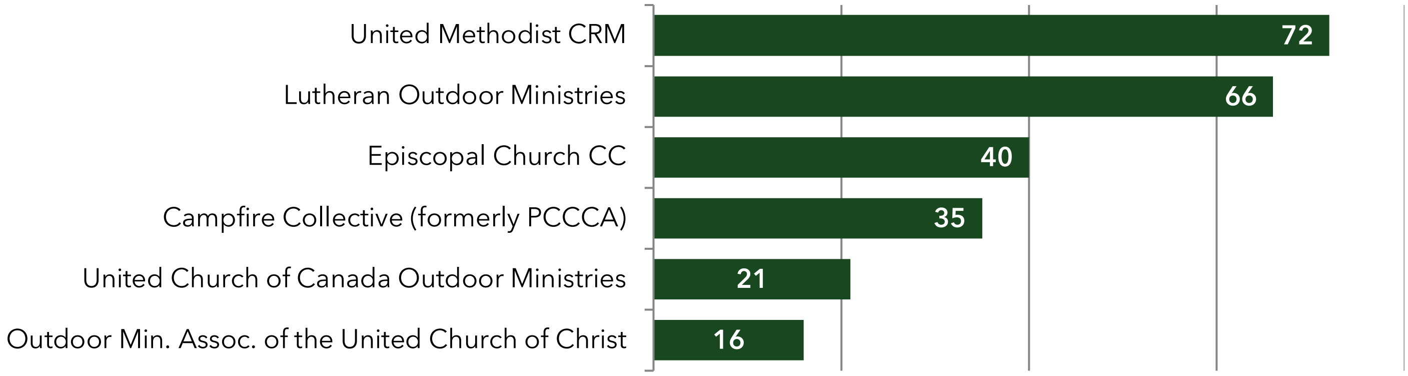
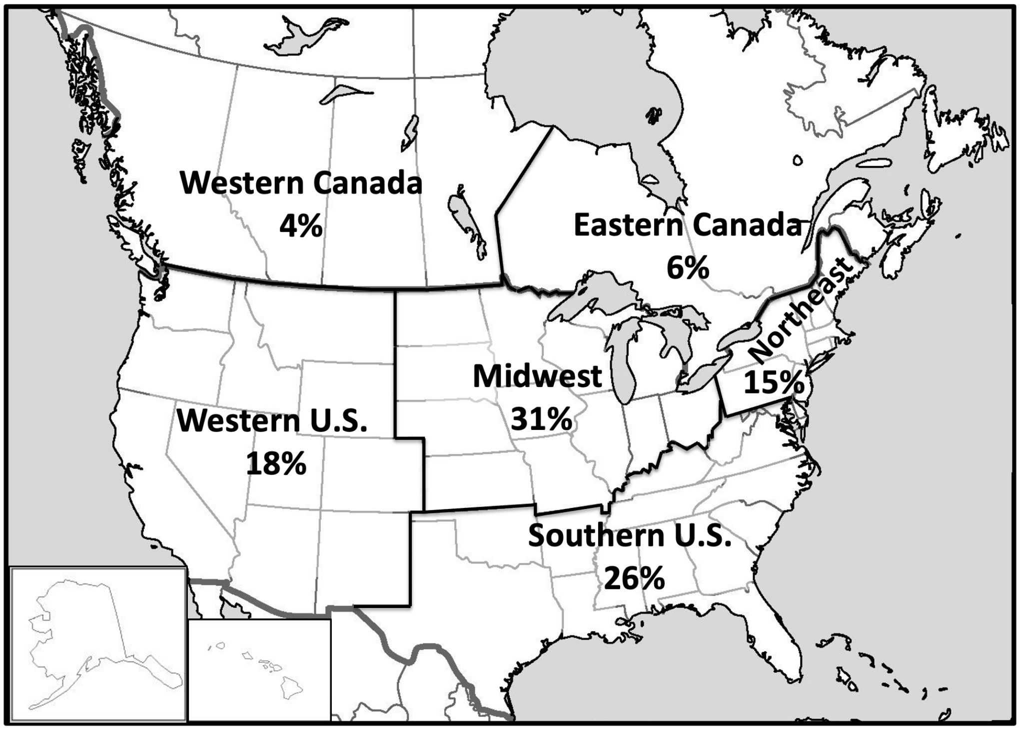


FIGURE 4B: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDING MINISTRIES, BY REGION, *n*=248



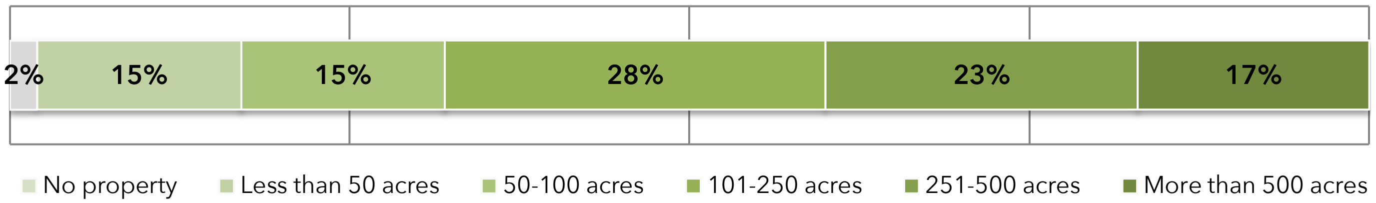
*Camp distribution by region was nearly identical to the 2020 and 2022 surveys

General Ministry Site Overview

- 89% of respondents were at a single-site ministry, while the other 11% had an organization representing multiple sites (a third of these had 2 sites, almost half had 3 sites, and the remaining 15% had 4+ sites)
- 82% of respondents indicated their ministry center is open year-round
- 78% Mixed-Use Sites: offered summer camp programming alongside other programming, such as retreats, conferences, and user groups
- 17% Primarily Summer Camps: limited or no other programs; these included two-thirds of Canadian sites
- 5% indicated that they did not offer summer camp programs (all of these were in the U.S.)

Property

FIGURE 5: PROPERTY SIZE IN ACRES, *n*=238



- 69% had more than 100 acres of property
- The average individual site was 423 acres, but the median was 176 acres

Full-time Employment

- 7% had no full-time staff members
- 14% employed 1 full-time staff member
- 25% employed 2-3
- 18% employed 4-5
- 23% employed 6-10
- 13% employed 11 or more

Employment Summary *(including full-time and part-time staff)*

- A third of outdoor ministry sites had 5 or fewer paid staff people (this included 10% operating with only one paid staff or none at all)
- Another third had between 6 and 12 paid staff members
- The remaining third had more than 12 paid staff members (including 10% with 27+ staff)

Vacancies

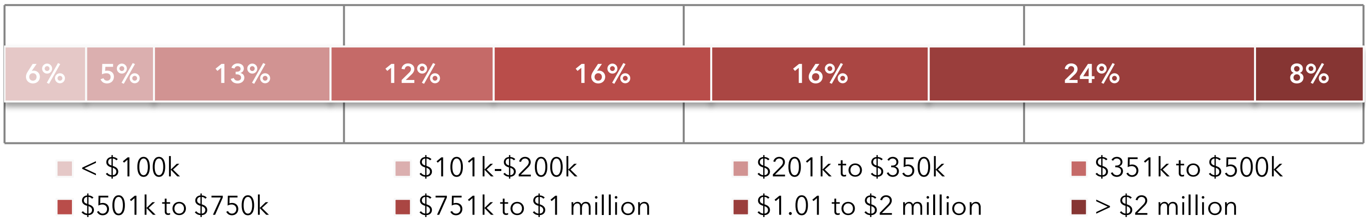
- Of the ministry centers reporting that they employed year-round staff people, 34% indicated that they currently had one or more staff vacancies, including 7% that had 3 or more vacancies.

Accreditation

- 58% of U.S. ministry centers were accredited through the American Camp Association (ACA)
- 18% were members of the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA)

Annual Operating Budget in 2024

FIGURE 6A · *n*=248



Budgets among responding OMC organizations were generally higher in 2024 compared with 2022 and 2020 respondents. About a third of responding organizations in 2024 had budgets over $1 million, compared with 23% in 2022 and 25% in 2020 (before the pandemic).

Fundraising & Donations Revenue in Comparison with Previous Year

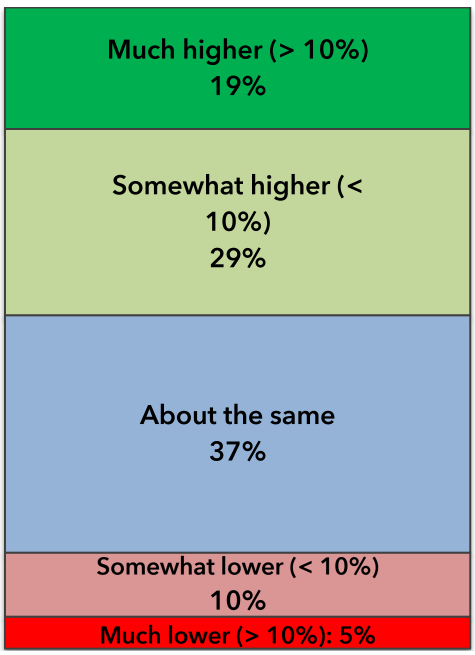


FIGURE 6B · *n*=242

Fundraising was generally up in 2024, with 48% of respondents indicating their revenue from fundraising and donations was higher than in the previous fiscal year and only 15% indicating lower fundraising revenue. Organizations with higher annual budgets reported more consistent increases in fundraising revenue.

FIGURE 6C: % REPORTING INCREASED FUNDRAISING REVENUE, BY ANNUAL BUDGET CATEGORY

	Higher than 2023
Budget: $200,000 or less	47%
Budget: $201k to $500k	42%
Budget: $501k to $1 million	48%
Budget: $1.01 to $2 million	52%
Budget: over $2 million	68%
All Ministry Centers	**48%**

Director Confidence That Ministry Center will be Operating in 5 years

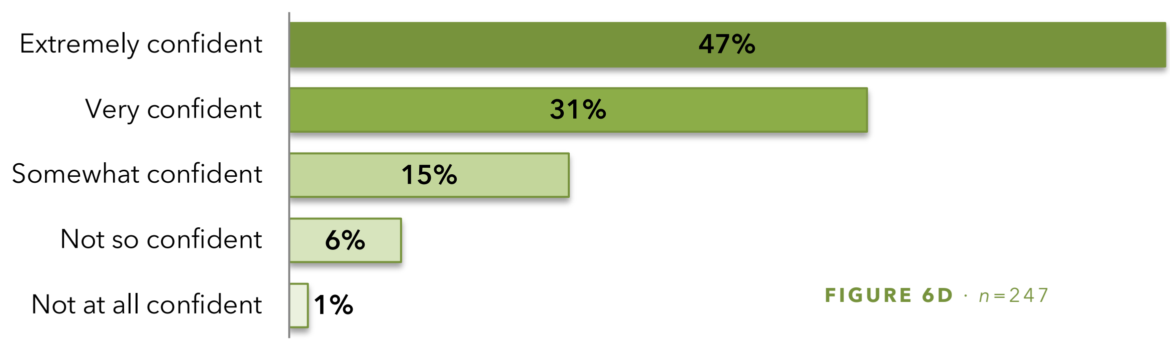


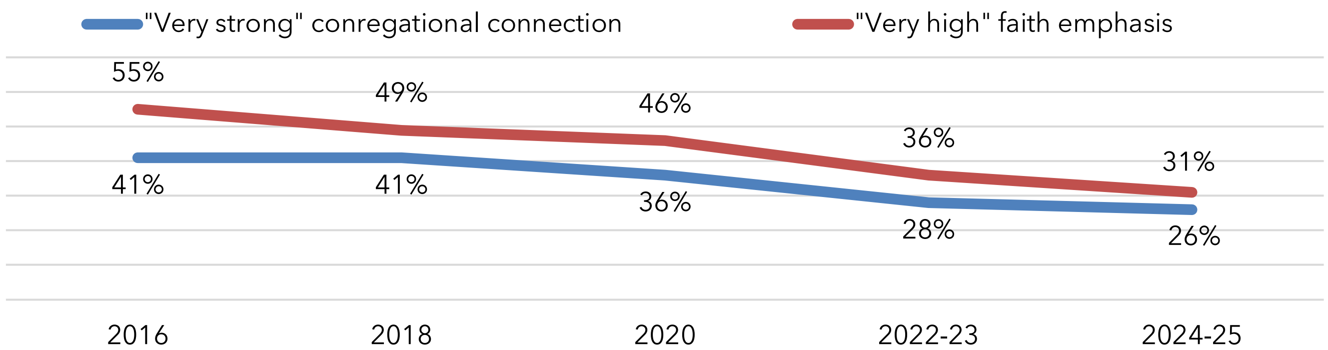
FIGURE 6D · *n*=247

Congregational Connection

One of the key assets of Christian outdoor ministries is their connection to reliable partners in their supporting congregational ministries. The stronger this connection, the more support the ministry center enjoys. When the OMC survey began in 2014 with Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and United Methodist ministries, 58% of responding directors indicating that “strengthening/supporting congregations” was “very” or “extremely important” to the philosophy of their ministry center. The average importance assigned to this priority has declined steadily since. Also in the 2024 survey, 26% of respondents indicated their ministry center had a “strong or very strong” connection to congregational ministries and the teachings of their faith tradition. This was down substantially from 41% in the 2016 and 2018 surveys, 36% in 2020, and 28% in 2022. Connections to congregational ministries continue to weaken.

Impressions of Congregational Connection and Faith Emphasis over Time

FIGURE 7A



The trend is clear over the past several years: both congregational connection and faith emphasis have been declining among OMC camps. Moreover, they have been declining in parallel, indicating a potential link between the two.

General Level of Involvement among Congregational Leaders/Clergy

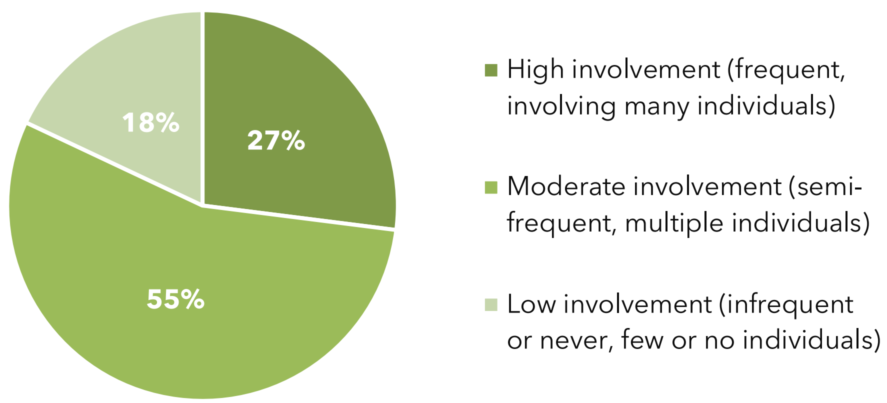
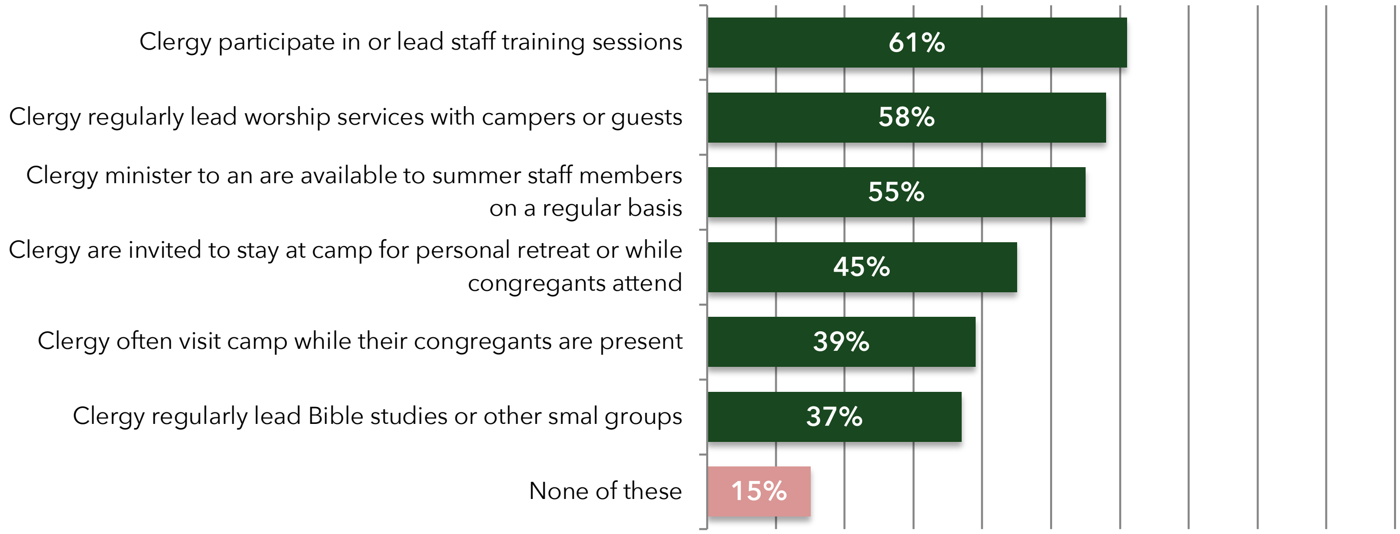


FIGURE 7B

Ways Clergy are Involved During the Summer Months

FIGURE 8 (*n*=240)



Combining the above survey items with frequency of clergy involvement, in general, suggests that 20% of ministry centers had low levels of clergy involvement, 30% moderately low involvement, and 50% moderately high or very high involvement. This was slightly higher than the clergy involvement among 2022 respondents, when only 42% were categorized as having moderately high or very high involvement.

Outdoor Ministry Type

Based on responses to multiple survey questions, ministry sites were categorized by their connection to congregational ministries/denominational teachings (weak connection, moderately weak, moderately strong, and strong connection) and the emphasis placed on faith/Christian practices (low, moderately low, moderately high, very high). Combining these two categories reveals four general types of mainline Protestant outdoor ministries:

1. **Nominally Christian:** Low faith emphasis, weak connection to congregations/denominational ministries
2. **Compartmentalized:** Moderate faith emphasis, moderate connection
3. **Disconnected:** High faith emphasis, weak connection to congregations/denominations
4. **Faith-Integrated:** High faith emphasis, strong connection to congregations/denominations

FIGURE 9A

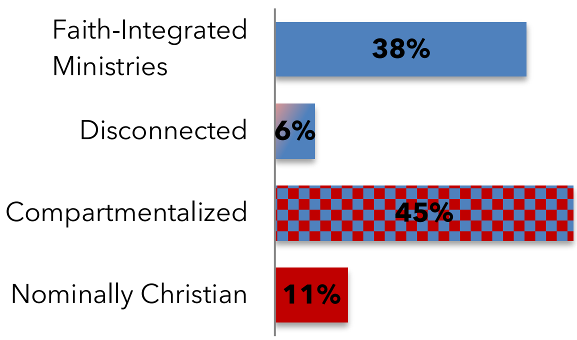
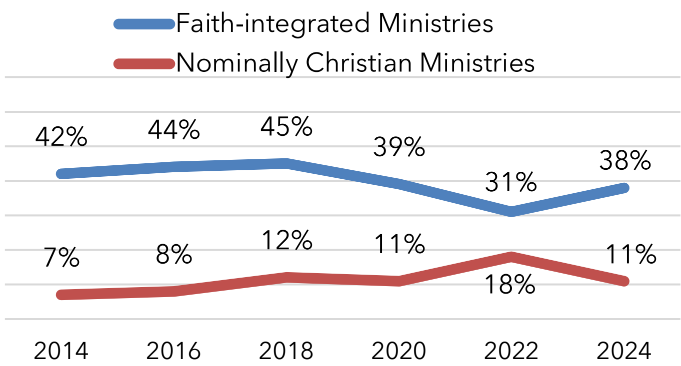


FIGURE 9B



The categories were much closer to 2020 levels than to 2022 levels, suggesting that the trend towards lower faith emphasis and away from connection to congregational ministries may have slowed somewhat. The calculation was recalibrated slightly for the 2024-25 survey, so these numbers may reflect this change rather than a change in the trend.

- The % of ministries comprising Nominal and Compartmentalized ministries has grown steadily each round of survey administration until this year. The combined percentage of these two types grew from under 30% in 2014 to 33% in 2016, 44% in 2018, 55% in 2020, and 61% in 2022-23. It dipped slightly to 56% in 2024-25.

Most prominent ministry type by region: **Northeast:** Compartmentalized, **Midwest:** Faith-Integrated, **South:** Faith-Integrated, **West:** Compartmentalized, **Canada:** Compartmentalized.

Threat Assessment

The following were identified as the greatest threats facing Outdoor Ministries Connection camps by directors in the 2024 OMC Directors Survey. This portion of the data set consisted of **237 responses**.

THREAT #1

Site & Infrastructure

Issues related to infrastructure and site were the most commonly identified threat by directors. The age of buildings and deferred maintenance on physical assets were most often mentioned, as well as some mention of the inability of current spaces to host and accommodate groups.

Identified as a Top Threat
99 of 237
42%

Identified as the #1 Threat
33 of 237
14%

THREAT #2

Increasing Costs

Rising costs and inflation were a significant, common threat identified by directors. Specifics included costs of food, supplies, and staffing. Note that fundraising, general finance, and the economy were broken out into their own categories. Combined, financially-related issues remain a significant threat.

Identified as a Top Threat
98 of 237
41%

Identified as the #1 Threat
36 of 237
15%

THREAT #3

Staffing

Staffing-related challenges remain a top threat according to directors. These challenges span denominations and include specifics like recruiting, retainment, staff quality, and inadequate staff numbers to run safe, effective programs. Both summer and seasonal staffing challenges were referenced.

Identified as a Top Threat
77 of 237
32%

Identified as the #1 Threat
21 of 237
9%

THREAT #4

Camper Numbers

The number of registered campers continues to be a challenge. Directors identified regular camper registrations for both summer and year-round opportunities, as well as user group utilization. Some referenced continued challenges recovering in participation and use from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Identified as a Top Threat
67 of 237
28%

Identified as the #1 Threat
28 of 237
12%

THREAT #5

Church Engagement

Directors identified challenges related to church engagement. They referenced declining congregation participation, dwindling youth ministries, and decreased interest and influence in the church as a whole. Competition and busy schedules were a common thread of perceived causation in declining church engagement.

Identified as a Top Threat
65 of 237
27%

Identified as the #1 Threat
28 of 237
12%

THREAT #6

Culture/Society

The effects of cultural and societal shifts have a continued impact on outdoor ministry, according to directors. Change or polarization in values, political points of view, and society's view of the church were referenced. Division within the church was also specifically referenced.

Identified as a Top Threat
54 of 237
23%

Identified as the #1 Threat
16 of 237
7%

THREAT #7

General Finances

Overall finances was identified as a common threat among outdoor ministry organizations. Most related comments referenced overall finances or budget, while some mentioned specifics like debt. The theme of sustainability into the future was identified specifically.

Identified as a Top Threat
52 of 237
22%

Identified as the #1 Threat
29 of 237
12%

THREAT #8

Fundraising & Donors

Directors identified shrinking donor bases as a challenge with specific mention of donor age, impact of market fluctuation on giving, and lack of diversification in donation streams. Declining financial support from churches and shifts in funding from judicatory bodies were referenced.

Identified as a Top Threat
49 of 237
21%

Identified as the #1 Threat
13 of 237
5%

THREAT #9

Judicatory/Denomination

Issue related to engagement with judicatory bodies and leaders was identified by directors as a threat. OMC sites vary in ownership, decision-making, and support models related to denominational affiliations. Decreases in funding, leadership support and advocacy, and mission alignment were mentioned.

Identified as a Top Threat
31 of 237
13%

Identified as the #1 Threat
16 of 237
7%

THREAT #10

Environment/Climate

Changes and issues related to the environment are an increasing threat according to directors. Climate change and increasing risk of environmental disasters such as fire, flood, snow, etc. and their effects on physical sites as well as insurance cost and availability were mentioned.

Identified as a Top Threat
20 of 37
8%

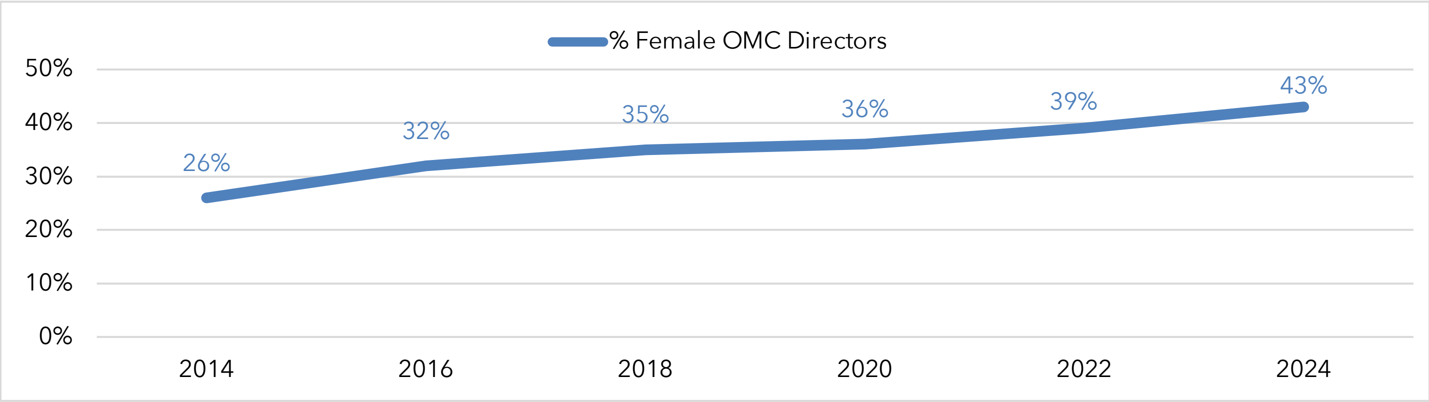
Identified as the #1 Threat
4 of 237
2%

Camp/Retreat Center Directors

About the Directors

- 5% of responding outdoor ministry centers had co-directors, most often with one male and one female
- 94% were white, and 6% were people of color
- Among all directors, 43% were female, 56% were male, and 1% were non-binary
  - The proportion of female camp directors continues to increase slowly but steadily (see below)
  - Young directors are still more likely to be female than older directors, but the gap is narrowing

FIGURE 12



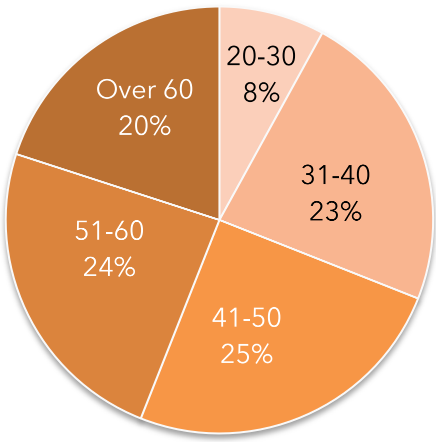
Education

- Education level: 7% did not have a bachelor's degree, 44% had a 4-year or bachelor's degree, 41% had a master's degree, and 8% had a doctorate
- 35% had a formal theological degree (including 21% with an M.Div) and an additional 5% had a professional certification in religion, theology, or ministry
- 33% had received no formal theological education
- The remaining 27% had taken some courses or continuing education focused on religion or theology

Director Age and Tenure

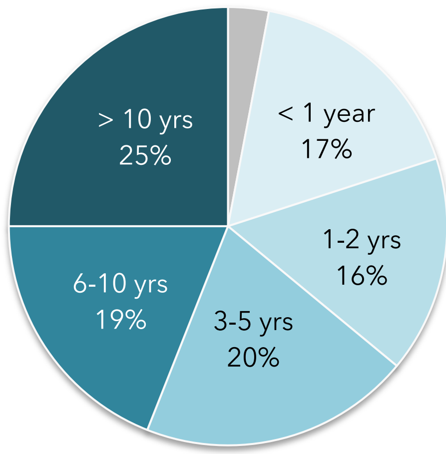
Director Age

FIGURE 13A



Current Director Tenure

FIGURE 13B



After a lag in director turnover in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, there was increased mobility evident in 2024-25, with a third of responding ministry centers having directors with tenures of 2 years or less. Only 3% of respondents indicated that their organization did not currently have a director. With the increased mobility was a corresponding drop in director age. About a third (31%) of directors in 2024-25 were 40 or under, compared with only 22% in 2022-23.

Director Demographics by Annual Budget Categories

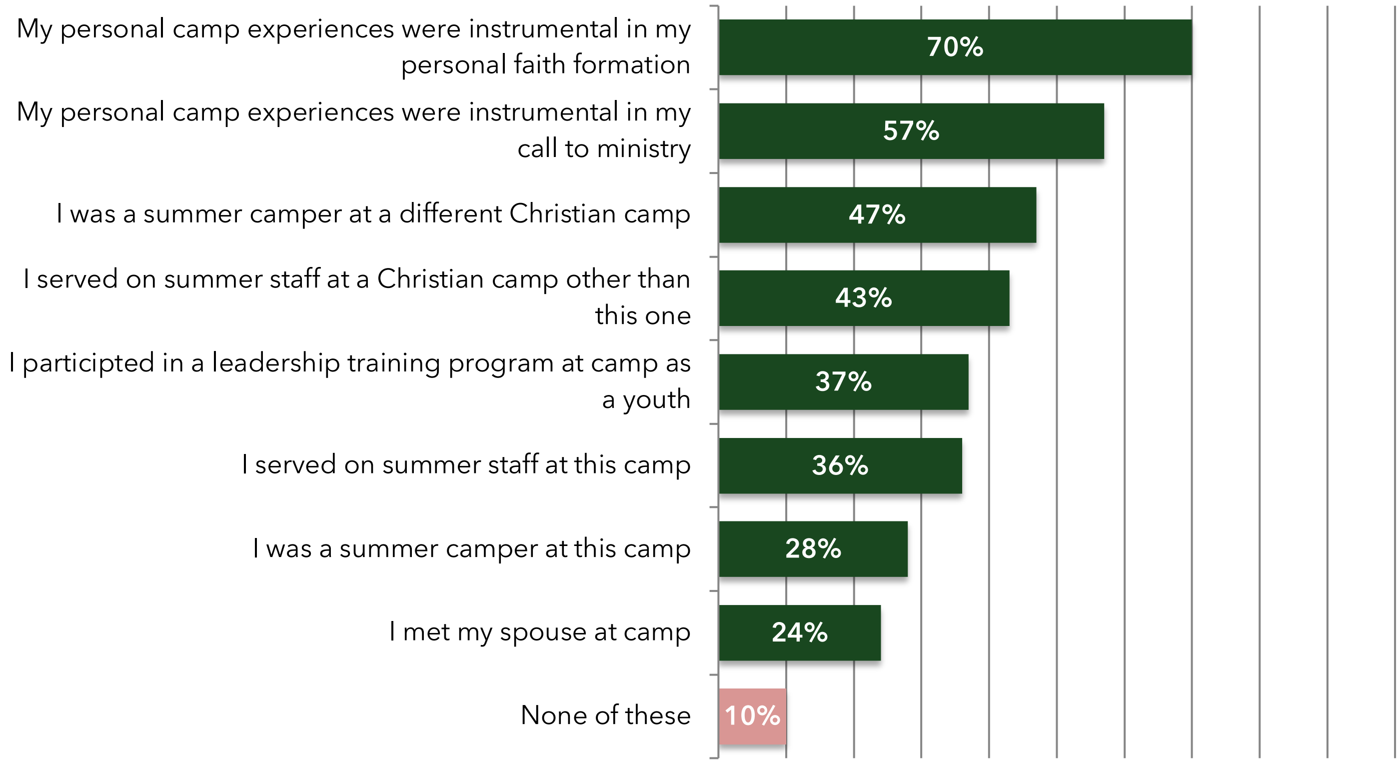
FIGURE 13C

	< $200k	$201k-$500k	$500k-$1 mil	>$1 million
Male director	32%	48%	56%	62%
Bachelor's degree or higher	86%	90%	92%	99%
Theological degree (any)	22%	34%	39%	36%
Tenure of more than 5 years	27%	23%	50%	58%
Age over 40	55%	54%	65%	89%

As in previous years, there were significant differences in director demographics when comparing ministry centers with small annual budgets with those having larger annual budgets. Directors of centers with larger annual budgets were much more likely to be male, older, have a higher level of education, and have a longer tenure. There was no difference in the race of directors based on organization budget.

In which of the following ways has camp impacted your personal story?

FIGURE 14A, *n*=244



- **75%** of respondents served on summer camp staff at either their current camp or another Christian camp
- **70%** attended summer camp, either at their current camp or another Christian camp
- Over half of respondents (**55%**) indicated 4 or more of the above ways camp impacted them

Respondent State of Being

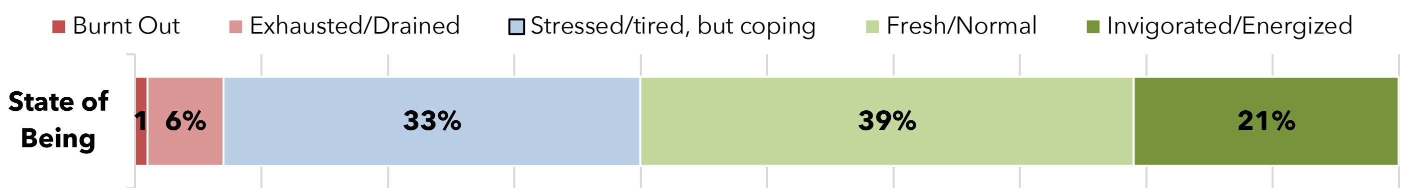


FIGURE 14B

- Director state of being was significantly more positive than in 2022, when 13% reported being exhausted/burnt out and only 12% invigorated/energized

Summer Camp 2024

Overall summer program summary

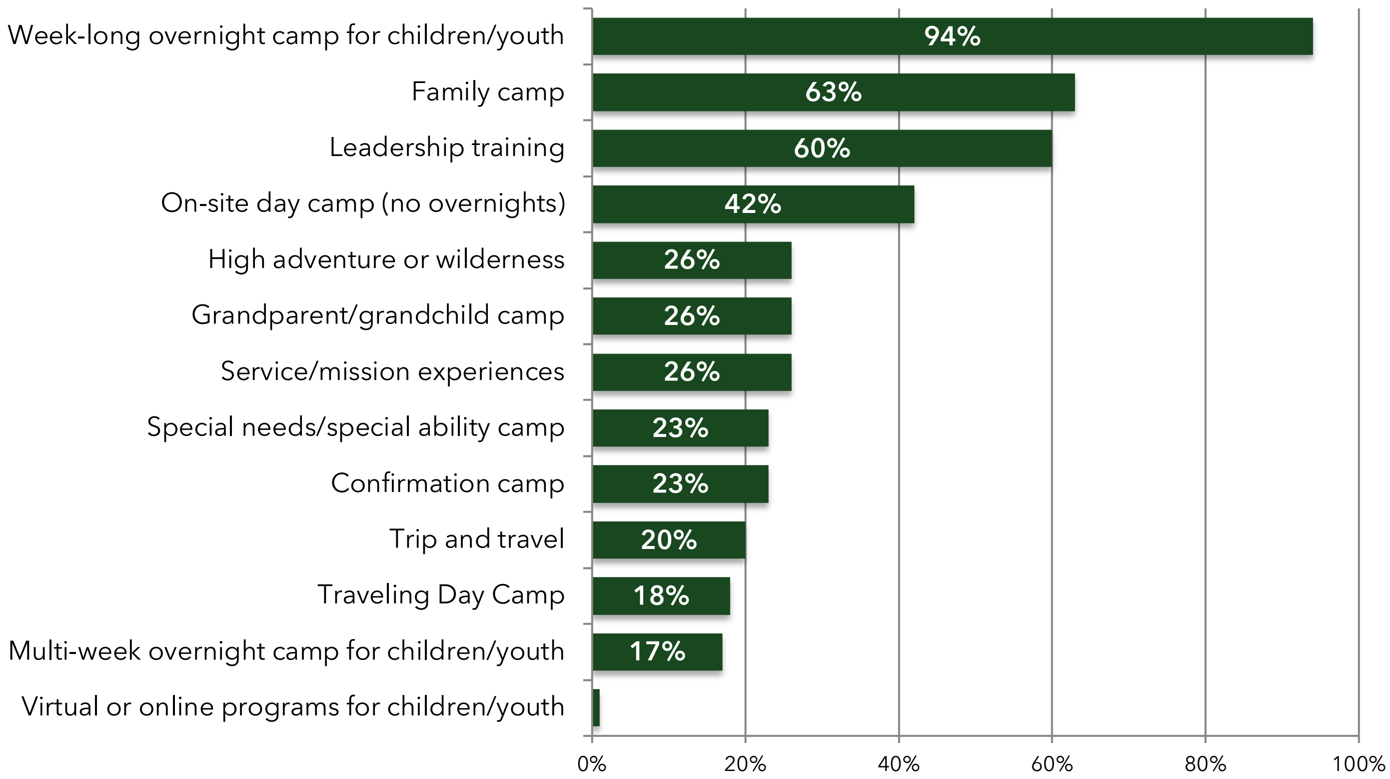
- 63% had primarily residential summer camp for children/youth (almost all of these were co-ed programs)
- 27% ran a combination of traditional overnight summer camp, day camps, and retreats or other programs
- 5% were primarily rental facilities for outside groups
- 3% were primarily retreat centers during the summer
- 2% typically ran day-camp, family camp, or other specialty camp programs

Weeks of Summer Programming

For those that offered summer camp programming, the median number of weeks offered in 2024 (not including staff training) was 7, with over ¾ of camps (77%) offering between 5 and 9 weeks of programming. 14% offered fewer than 5 weeks, and 9% offered more than 9 weeks. This was nearly identical to 2022.

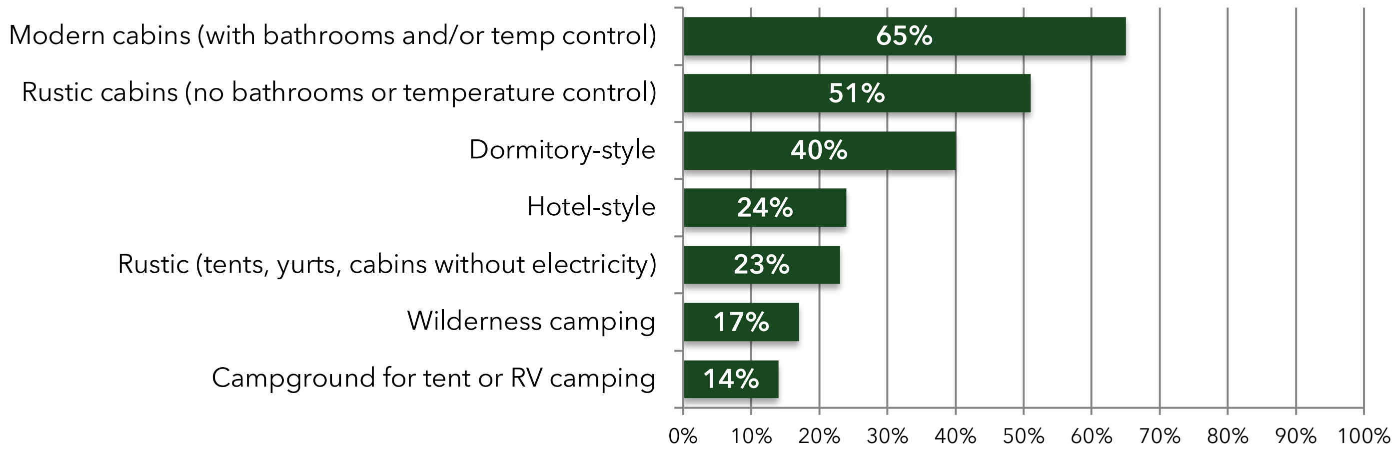
Summer Ministry Sessions Offered
(of 235 centers offering summer camp programs)

FIGURE 15, *n*=235



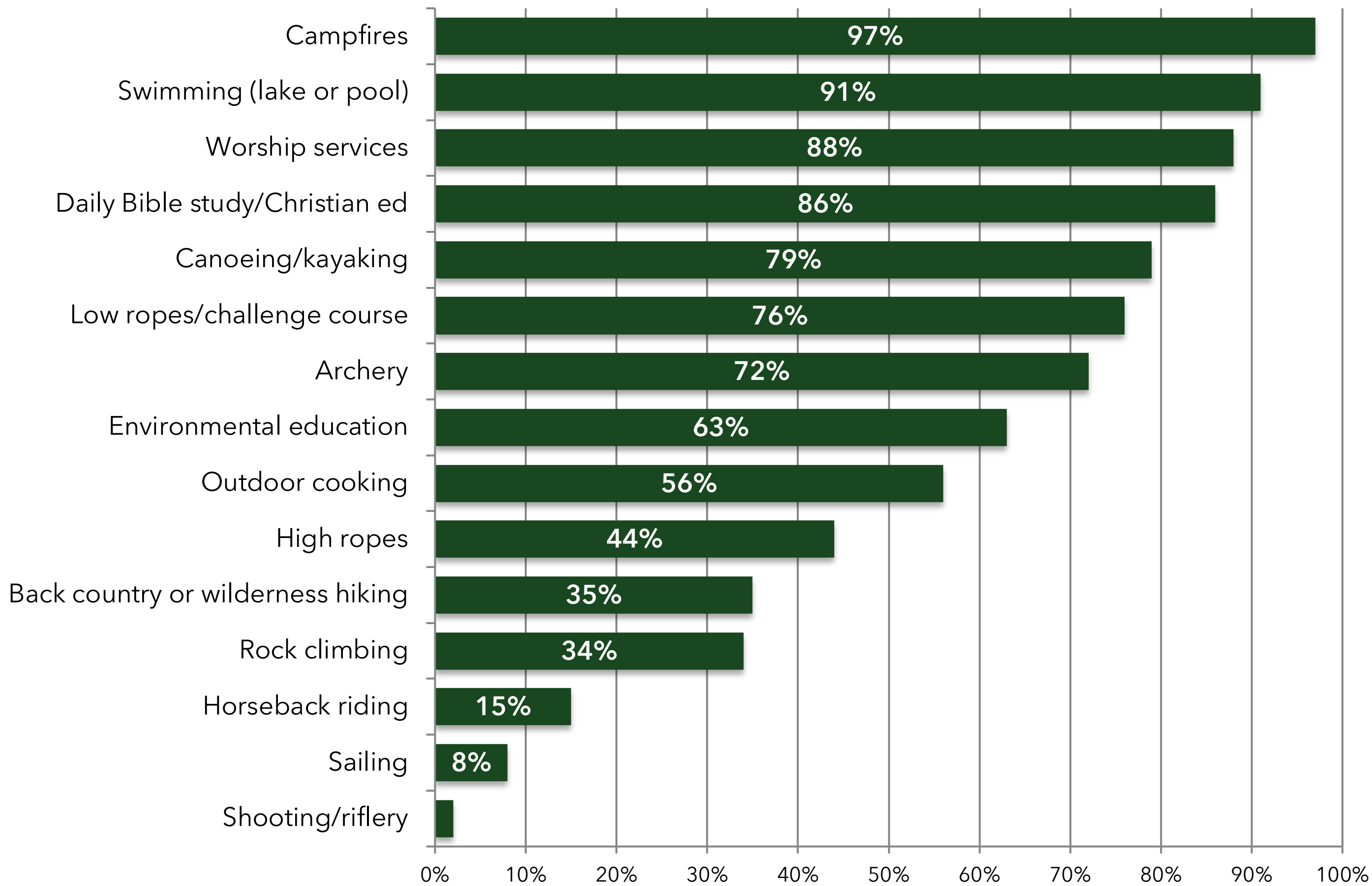
Summer Housing Accommodations Available

FIGURE 16A, *n*=243



Which of the following are regularly offered during summer programming?

FIGURE 16B, *n*=239



Centralized and Decentralized Programming

Centralized programming was defined as having "daily large-group activities, individual participant choice, and large-group meals," while decentralized programming was defined as having "activities by participant group, few all-camp activities, and meals in small groups." As in years past, OMC camps tended to be more centralized than decentralized.

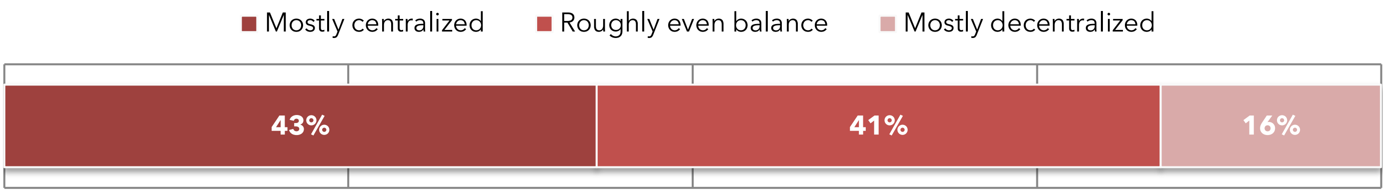
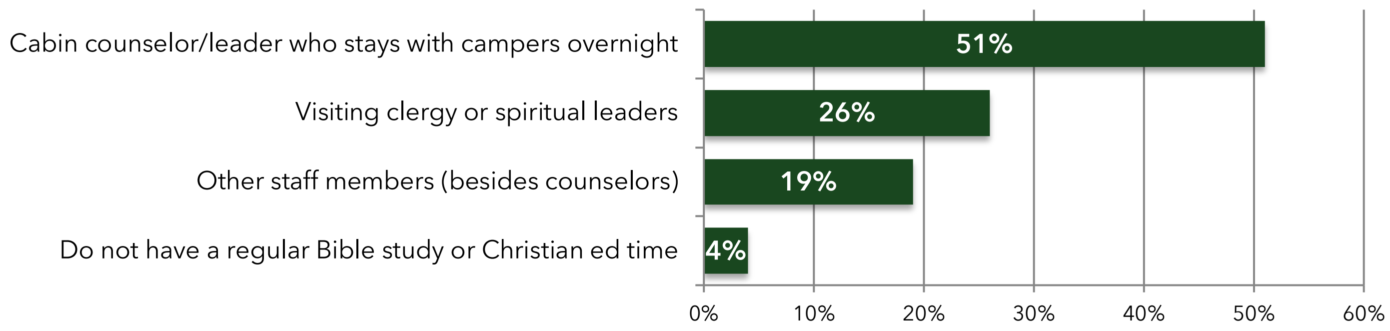


FIGURE 17A, *n*=218

For the majority of your camp programs, who leads/facilitates the Bible study or Christian education time?

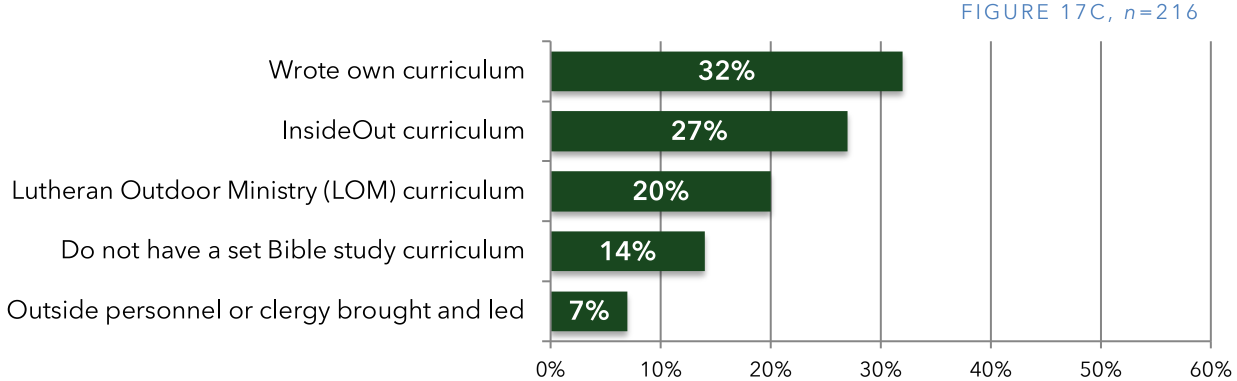
FIGURE 17B, *n*=220



- There was wide variability in Bible study method among the different OMC organizations. Having the cabin counselor lead Bible study was the dominant method among LOM camps (85%), while the same was true for 60% of Campfire Collective camps, 52% of UMCRM camps, and only 13% of ECCC camps (66% of which had visiting clergy lead Bible study).

What did your camp use for summer Bible study curriculum?

FIGURE 17C, *n*=216



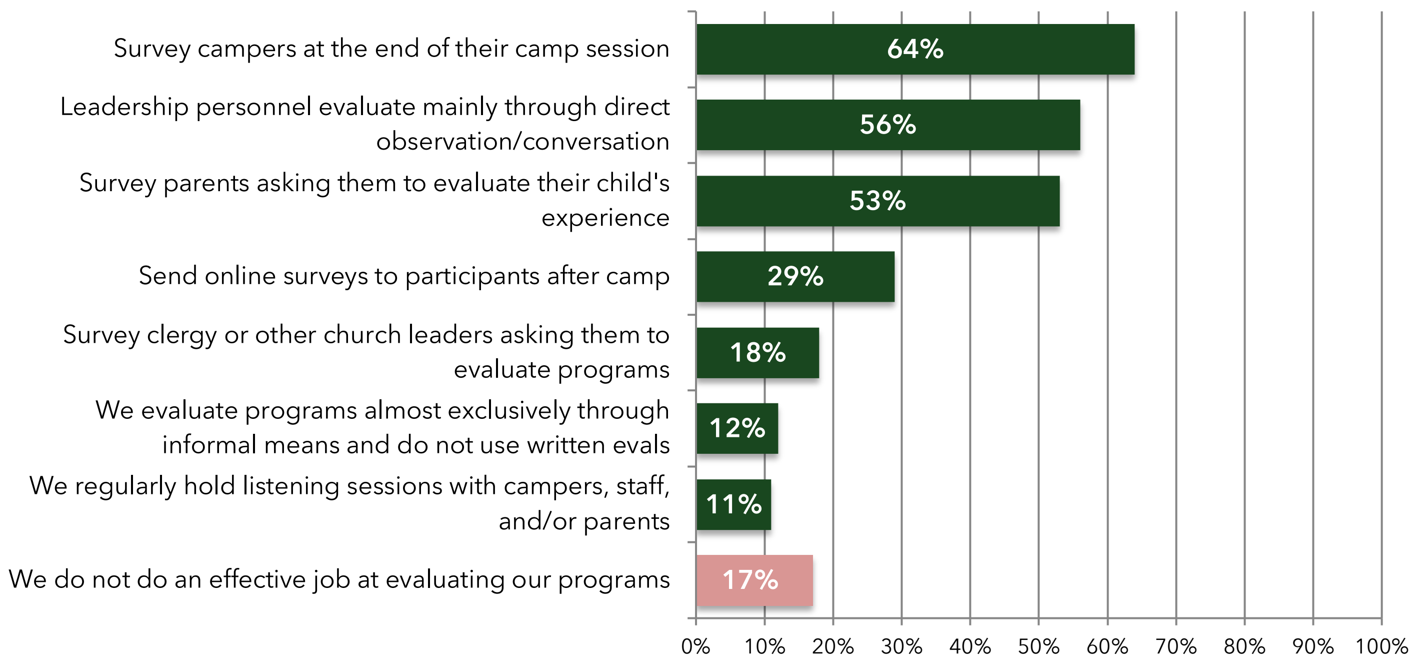
Percentage of Camps, by Denomination, Using Bible Study Curricula (2024)

FIGURE 18A

	InsideOut	LOM curriculum	Wrote own curriculum	Outside personnel	No set curriculum
UMCRM	50%	9%	30%	5%	6%
LOM	3%	60%	31%	0%	5%
ECCC	13%	3%	28%	31%	25%
Campfire Collective	38%	10%	42%	0%	10%
OMA-UCC	73%	0%	20%	0%	7%
OMI-Canada	0%	0%	42%	5%	53%
TOTAL	**27%**	**20%**	**32%**	**7%**	**14%**

Evaluation Methods Used in 2024

FIGURE 18B, *n*=223



Summer Camp Enrollment in 2024

Summer Capacity

Summer camp capacity varied widely among the responding ministry centers. About a third of respondents had capacity for under 100 overnight guests at a time. Another third had capacity for 100-150 overnight guests. The top third had capacity for over 150 overnight guests at a time.

- This capacity was identical to the 2022 survey.
- Fewer than half (45%) of camps indicated their enrollment was at least 75% of capacity in 2024 (including only 15% saying enrollment was at 90% capacity or higher).
- Only 35% indicated that enrollment was higher than in 2023, with 26% reporting lower enrollment.
- For more than a quarter of camps (28%), enrollment was still down when considering the past 5 years.

Summer Camp Enrollment Trends

FIGURE 19

<table>
<tr><th></th><th></th><th>2014*</th><th>2016</th><th>2018</th><th>2020</th><th>2022</th><th>2024</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Enrollment as % of capacity</td><td>90% capacity or higher</td><td>14%</td><td>13%</td><td>15%</td><td>4%</td><td>22%</td><td>15%</td></tr>
<tr><td>75% to 89% capacity</td><td>45%</td><td>32%</td><td>31%</td><td>3%</td><td>27%</td><td>30%</td></tr>
<tr><td>50% to 74% capacity</td><td rowspan="2">41%</td><td>35%</td><td>35%</td><td>12%</td><td>36%</td><td>31%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Less than 50% capacity</td><td>20%</td><td>19%</td><td>81%</td><td>15%</td><td>24%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Enrollment compared with previous summer</td><td>Much higher than previous summer (> 10%)</td><td rowspan="2">45%</td><td rowspan="2">45%</td><td>11%</td><td>1%</td><td>38%</td><td>11%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Somewhat higher (< 10% higher)</td><td>33%</td><td>3%</td><td>35%</td><td>24%</td></tr>
<tr><td>About the same as last summer</td><td>33%</td><td>39%</td><td>35%</td><td>6%</td><td>14%</td><td>39%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Somewhat lower (< 10% lower)</td><td rowspan="2">22%</td><td rowspan="2">16%</td><td>18%</td><td>5%</td><td>8%</td><td>16%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Much lower than previous summer (> 10%)</td><td>3%</td><td>85%</td><td>5%</td><td>10%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Enrollment compared with past 5 years</td><td>Highest of past 5 summers</td><td>-</td><td>25%</td><td>27%</td><td>2%</td><td>13%</td><td>18%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Higher than most of past 5 summers</td><td>-</td><td>21%</td><td>21%</td><td>3%</td><td>16%</td><td>25%</td></tr>
<tr><td>About the same as past 5 summers</td><td>-</td><td>34%</td><td>30%</td><td>6%</td><td>26%</td><td>29%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lower than most of past 5 summers</td><td>-</td><td>13%</td><td>17%</td><td>7%</td><td>35%</td><td>22%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lowest of past 5 summers</td><td>-</td><td>6%</td><td>5%</td><td>82%</td><td>10%</td><td>6%</td></tr>
</table>

* The 2014 survey consisted only of UMCRM, LOM, PCCCA, and ECCC respondents, as OMC had yet to form

Overnight Summer Camp Enrollment

Respondents were asked to provide enrollment numbers for both summer 2023 and summer 2024 for several programs they indicated offering. For overnight summer camp:

In 2023, 199 camps provided data

- Average overnight camper enrollment was **477**
- A quarter of camps enrolled fewer than 175 overnight campers, a quarter 175-300, a quarter 301-600, and a quarter more than 600 campers
- The top 10% enrolled more than 1000 campers
- Together, these camps served **94,917** overnight campers

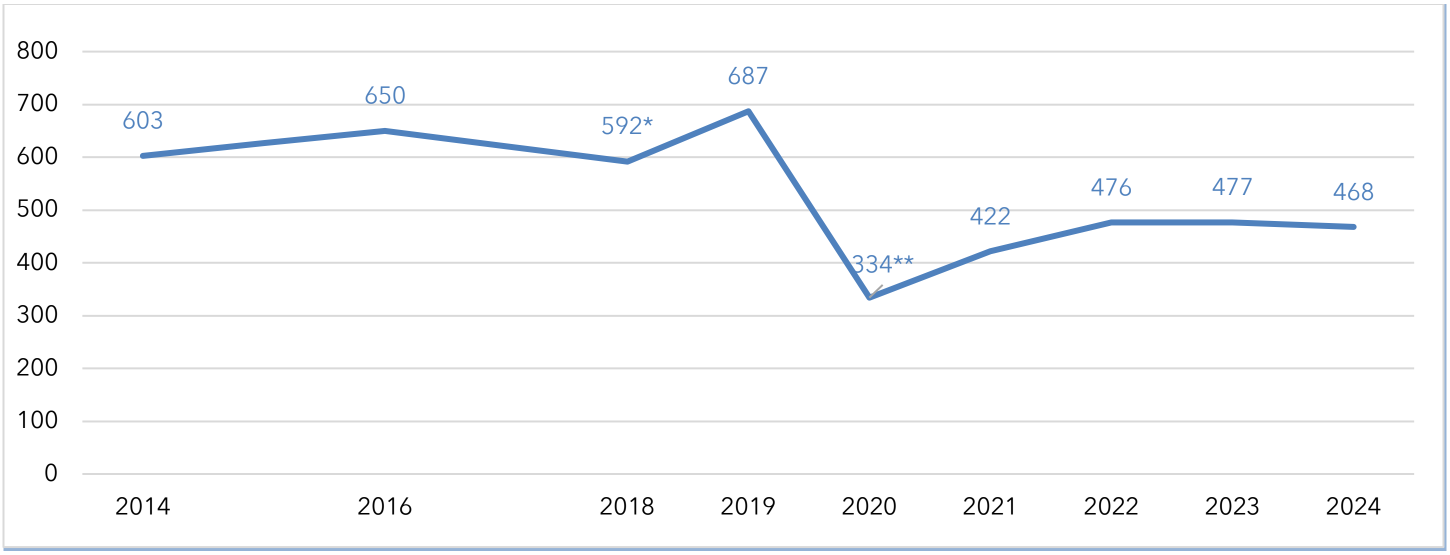
In 2024, 203 camps provided data

- Average overnight camper enrollment was **468**
- A quarter of camps enrolled fewer than 165 overnight campers, a quarter 165-300, a quarter 301-600, and a quarter more than 600 campers (for comparison, in 2019, the top quarter served 800+ overnight campers)
- The top 10% enrolled 1000 or more campers
- Together, they served **95,074** overnight campers

Considering only the 197 camps that offered both 2023 and 2024 numbers, there was an overall **decrease** of 1.2%

Average Overnight Summer Camp Numbers Among OMC Camps, 2014-2024

FIGURE 20



*The drop in average summer camp numbers in 2018 is attributable almost entirely to a drop in Lutheran Outdoor Ministries camps during the year of the triennial ELCA Youth Gathering

**88% of camps canceled their overnight camp programs in 2020. This number represents only those camps that offered overnight camp programs.

Day Camp Enrollment

42% of camps indicated that they operated on-site day camp programs.

In 2023, 78 of these camps operated day camp and provided enrollment data

- Average day camp enrollment was **256**
- Half of camps enrolled fewer than 90 day campers, a quarter 90-310, and a quarter more than 310 campers
- The top 10% enrolled 550 or more campers
- Together, these camps served **19,982** day campers

In 2024, 84 camps operated day camp and provided enrollment data

- Average day camp enrollment was **244**
- Half of camps enrolled 90 or fewer day campers, a quarter 91-300, and a quarter more than 300 campers
- The top 10% enrolled more than 500 campers
- Together, they served **20,530** day campers (not a significant change over the same camps in 2023)

Family Camp Enrollment

Almost 2/3 of camps (63%) indicated that they operated family camp programs (identical to 2022 numbers).

In 2023, 129 of these camps operated family camp and provided enrollment data

- Average family camp enrollment was **122** (this was much lower than in 2022, when the average was 160)
- Half of camps enrolled 55 or fewer family campers, a quarter 56-100, and a quarter over 100 participants
- The top 10% enrolled 200 or more family campers
- Together, these camps served **15,702** family campers, with over half (54%) served by the top 10%

In 2024, 130 camps operated family camp and provided enrollment data

- Average family camp enrollment was **128**
- Half of camps enrolled 56 or fewer family campers, a quarter 57-124, and a quarter 125 or more participants
- The top 10% enrolled 220 or more family campers
- Together, they served **16,690** family campers
- Among camps that offered data for 2023 and 2024, there was a 7% overall increase in family camp numbers

Traveling Day Camp

18% of camps offered traveling day camp programs. These were most common among LOM camps (51%), followed by UMCRM camps (12%). Only 2% of camps affiliated with neither LOM nor UMCRM offered traveling day camp.

- Traveling day camp programs declined sharply following the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, 31% of camps operated these programs, including 69% of LOM camps and 18% of UMCRM camps.
- More than half of camps (57%) offering traveling day camp reported an increase in the number of day camp programs offered in 2024 compared with 2023, while 21% reported a decrease

Leadership Training Programs

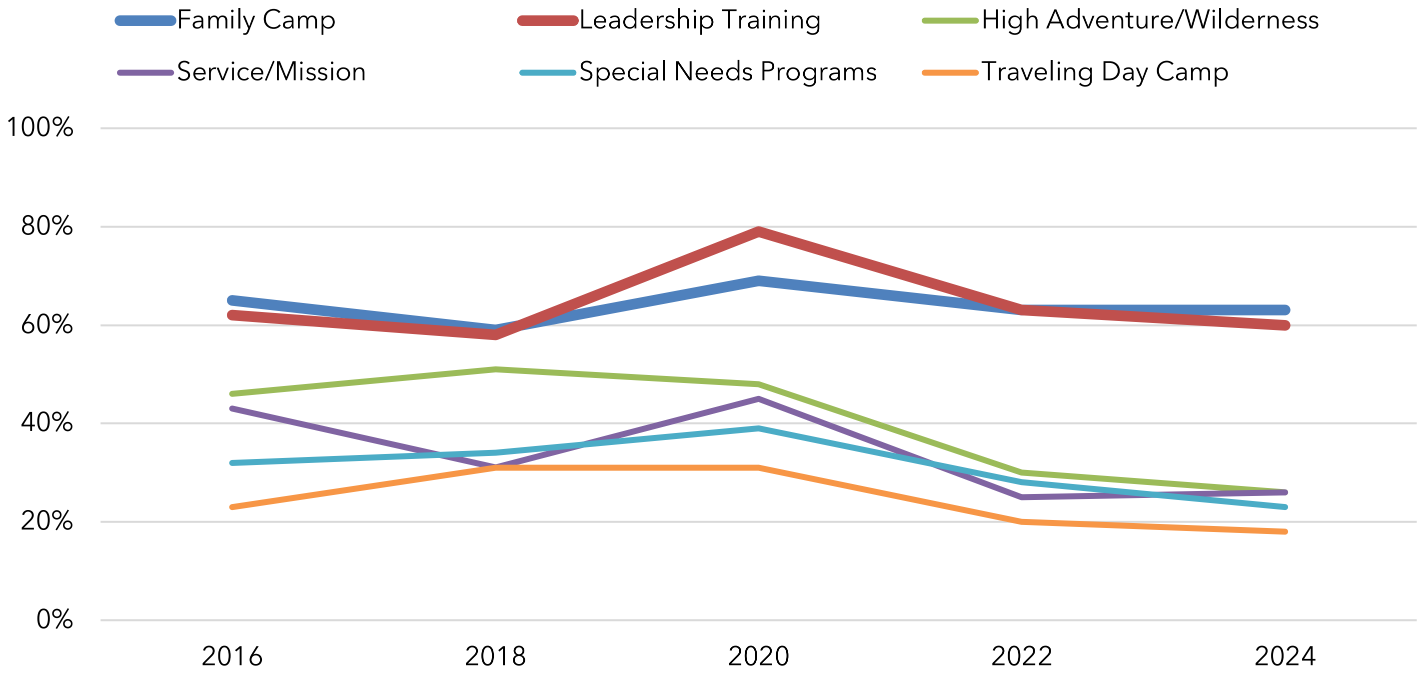
60% of camps indicated that they offered leadership training programs.

In 2024, 120 of these camps operated leadership training programs and provided enrollment data

- Average leadership training enrollment was **21** (somewhat lower than 2022, when the average was 22)
- Half of all camps enrolled 13 or fewer participants in their program, a quarter 14-29, and the remaining quarter 30 or more participants
- The top 10% enrolled 50 or more leadership training participants

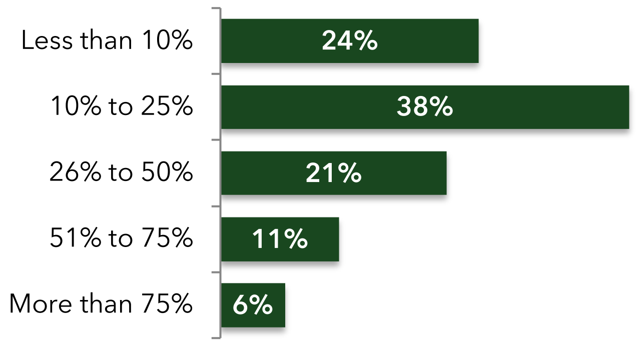
Percentage of Camps Offering Specialty Programs, 2016-2024

FIGURE 22A



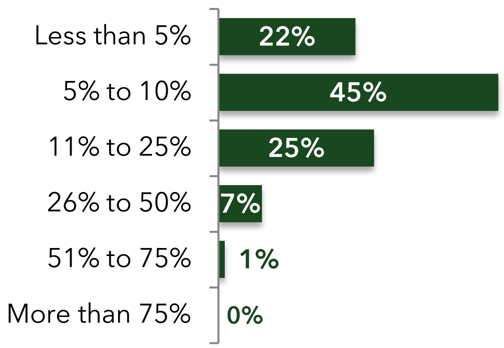
% of Campers Receiving Financial Assistance

FIGURE 22B, *n*=207



% of Campers Representing Racial Minorities

FIGURE 22C, *n*=192



Summer Camp Fees

Average weekly camp fee in U.S. $551 USD

- 25% of camps charged $630 or more for their typical week-long overnight program. At the low end, a quarter of camps charged $450 or less.
- In Canada, the average weekly camp fee was $537 CAD, though this varied widely from East to West

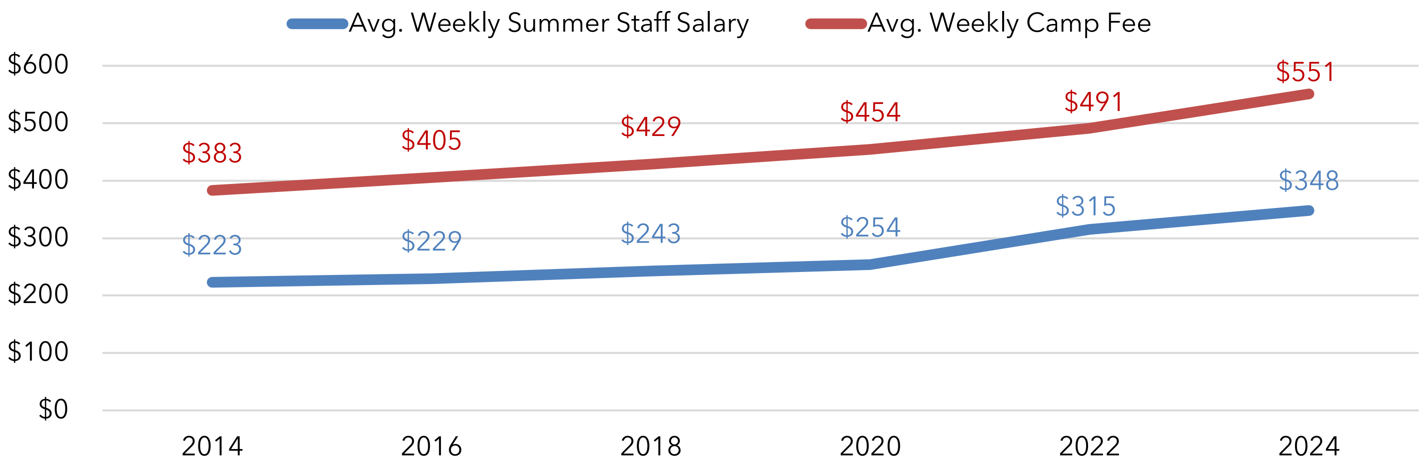
Average Weekly Camp Fee, by Geographic Region, 2020-2024

FIGURE 23A

	Northeast U.S.	Midwest	South U.S.	West U.S.	East Canada	West Canada
2024	**$576**	**$521**	**$598**	**$517**	**$590 CAD**	**$449 CAD**
2022	$518	$468	$507	$486	$476 CAD	$363 CAD
2020	$451	$430	$479	$453	$457 CAD	$356 CAD

Summer Staff Weekly Salary and Weekly Camper Fee Trends in United States 2014-2024

FIGURE 23B



- The average fee for a week of summer camp at an OMC camp in the U.S. rose 43.9% from 2014 to 2024, higher than the rate of inflation (approximately 28.7% cumulatively, with most occurring from 2020-2022). The average OMC summer staff weekly salary rose 56.1% in that time, with about half of this gain occurring from 2020 to 2022.

Summer Camp Staff

Average weekly summer staff salary $348 USD

- A third of camps in the United States paid summer staff $375 or more per week. At the low end, a third paid less than $300 per week. The middle third paid between $301 and $374 per week. The top 10% paid more than $450 per week.
- Average weekly salary in Canada was $494

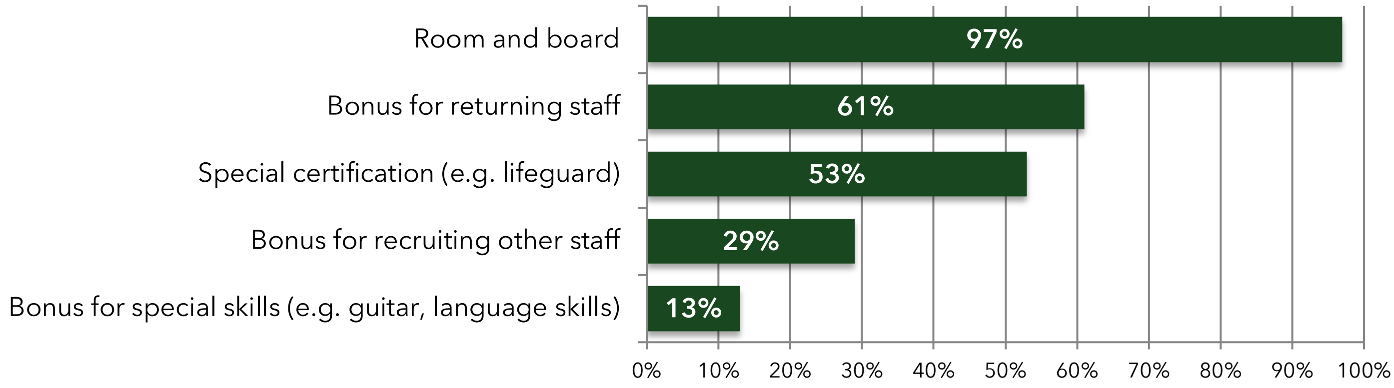
Average Weekly Summer Staff Salary by Geographic Region

FIGURE 24A

	Northeast U.S.	Midwest	South U.S.	West U.S.	East Canada	West Canada
2024	**$332**	**$362**	**$304**	**$403**	**$425 CAD**	**$589 CAD**
2022	$343	$318	$271	$366	$348 CAD	$533 CAD
2020	$238	$255	$241	$287	$308 CAD	$523 CAD

Incentives Offered to Summer Staff

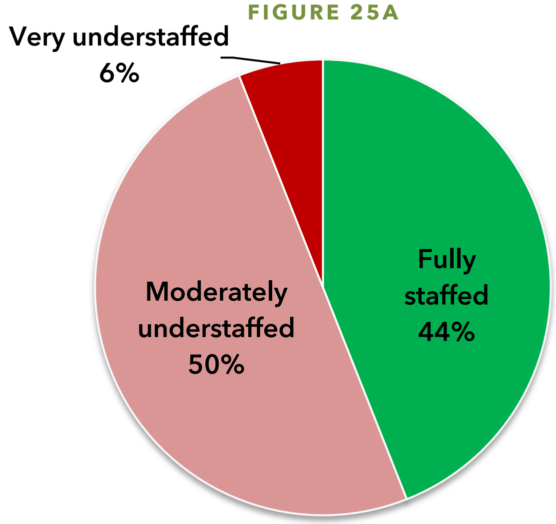
FIGURE 24B, *n*=216



*Other incentives that camps indicated offering included an early signing bonus and a bonus for working the entire summer.

Staffing Level · Summer 2024

FIGURE 25A



The staffing crisis that was the most consistent overall challenge and threat in 2022 had greatly abated by summer 2024. Though 56% of responding ministry centers were at least moderately understaffed in 2024, the same was true for 81% in 2022.

Higher staff salaries did not correlate with higher staffing levels. 48% of those in the bottom third of weekly staff salaries were fully staffed, compared with only 39% of those in the top third of weekly staff salaries.

There were differences in staffing levels based on region. Those in the Western USA were the least likely to report being fully staffed (36%), while those in the Northeast USA were the most likely to be fully staffed (56%). The Midwest (40%), South (46%), and Canada (44%) were close to the overall average in terms of being fully staffed.

Different Staffing Models

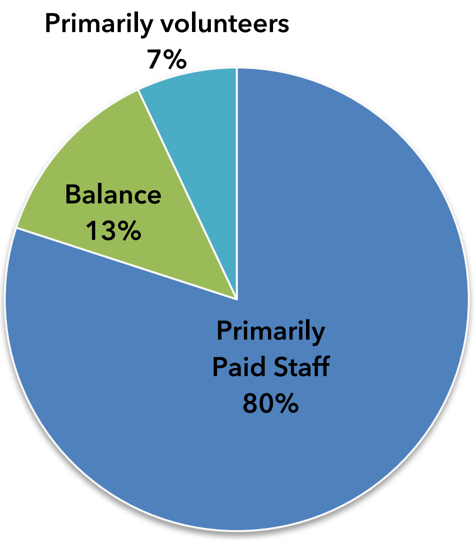


FIGURE 25B

Most OMC camps (80%) relied primarily (46%) or exclusively (34%) on paid summer staff members. Their experience included a period of specialized staff training. The average training period for paid staff lasted for 10 days. The majority of camps (72%) operated between 7 and 14 days of staff training, with many including additional days for leadership staff or specialty staff.

Other camps relied primarily (7%) or in part (13%) on volunteer staff members. These staff generally received much less training than their paid counterparts. The average training for volunteer staff was 2 days, with 80% receiving between 1 and 3 days of training.

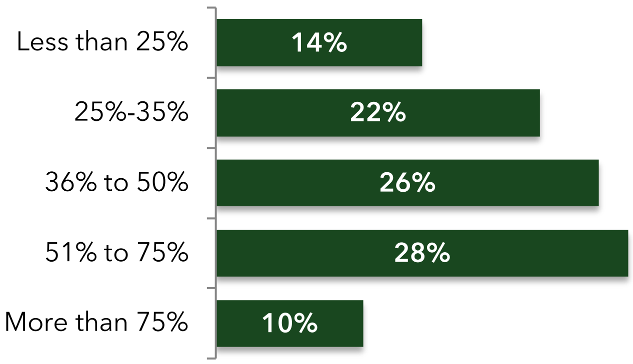
Summer Staff Numbers and Training

The number of staff camps employed during the summer varied widely, with a quarter of all responding camps employing 10 or fewer paid seasonal staff members during the summer, another quarter employing 11-20, another quarter 21-34, and only a quarter of camps employing 35 or more seasonal summer staff. The top 10% employed 55 or more summer staff.

- **Average number of seasonal summer staff in 2024: 28**
- This average was up slightly from 27 in 2023 and 25 in 2022, providing further evidence that the summer staff shortage that was such a crisis in 2022 was abating

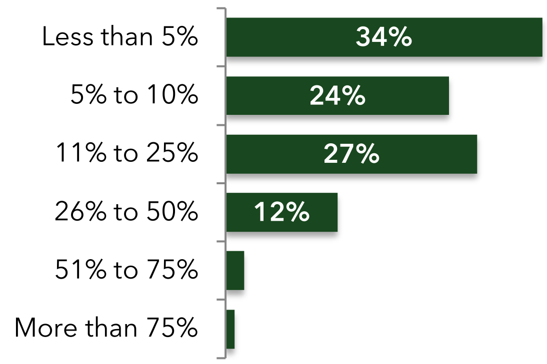
% of Summer Staff Returning from previous summers

FIGURE 26A, *n*=230



% of Summer Staff Representing Racial Minorities

FIGURE 26B, *n*=227



Summer Camp Summary Statistics, by Annual Operating Budget

FIGURE 26C

	Budget < $200k	Budget $200k-$500k	Budget $500k-$1 mil	Budget >$1 Million
Average weekly camp fee (U.S. only)	$398	$512	$543	$618
Average weekly staff salary (U.S. only)	$394	$365	$341	$340
Use primarily/exclusively paid summer staff	60%	72%	84%	87%
Average number of paid summer staff (2024)	9	16	23	49
Average number of overnight campers (2024)	119	258	402	831
% Camper enrollment higher than 2023	35%	39%	34%	32%
% Camper enrollment at 90% capacity	10%	11%	11%	26%
% Faith-integrated camps	27%	27%	43%	44%

Retreats and Conferences

Primary clientele for retreats/conferences

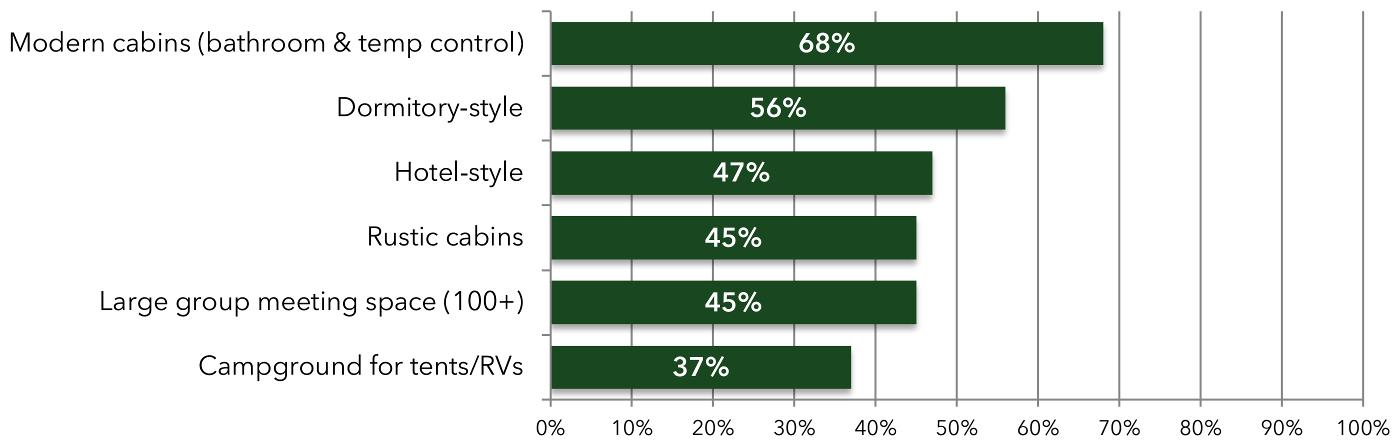
- 67% Mix of children, youth, adults, and families
- 27% Primarily **adults**
- 6% Primarily **youth/children**

Retreat/Conference Ministry Summary

- 31% Primarily or exclusively user groups and facility rental
- 50% Majority user groups/facility rental with some programmed/hosted retreats
- 14% Balance of user group/facility rental and programmed/hosted retreats
- 2% Majority (or primarily) programmed/hosted retreats
- 3% None of these

Retreat Accommodations Offered

FIGURE 27, *n*=218



- Almost two-thirds of responding retreat centers (63%) offered 3 or more of the above options, an increase over 2022 respondents
- The percentage of ministry centers offering the above accommodations has remained steady since 2016, with only slight increases (< 5%) in the percentages offering modern cabins and dormitory-style accommodations

Seasonal Retreat Staff

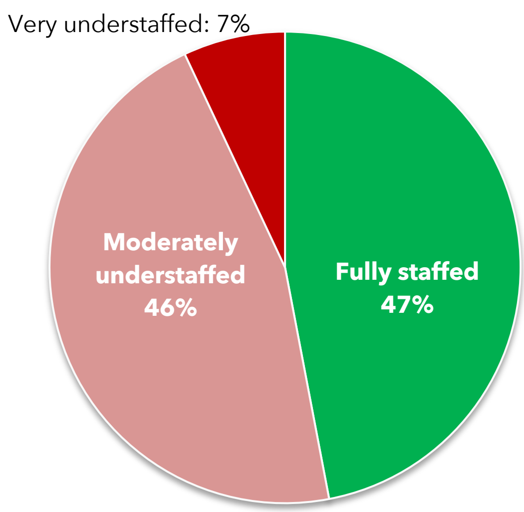


FIGURE 28A

Almost two-thirds of ministry centers (62%) hired seasonal staff during the retreat season in 2024. They employed an average of just over 6 seasonal staff in fall 2024. About a third hired 1-3 seasonal staff, a third 4-6, and a third 7 or more. The number was still down from the average of 9 seasonal staff in fall 2019, and it was slightly higher than the 2022 and 2023 averages.

The total number of seasonal staff members employed across the sites that provided data (*n*=211) increased by a modest 8% from fall 2023 to fall 2024.

Percentage of Retreat/Conference Guests Affiliated with Constituent Denomination(s)

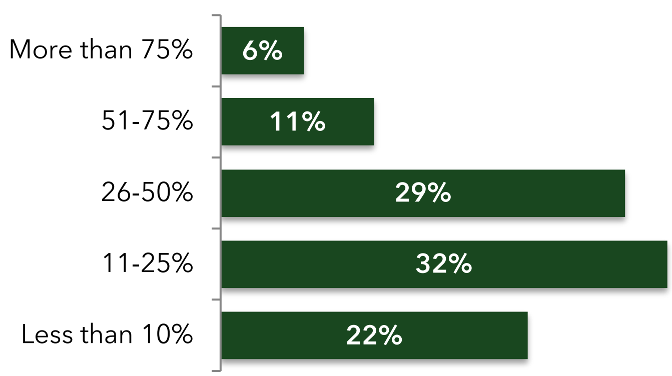
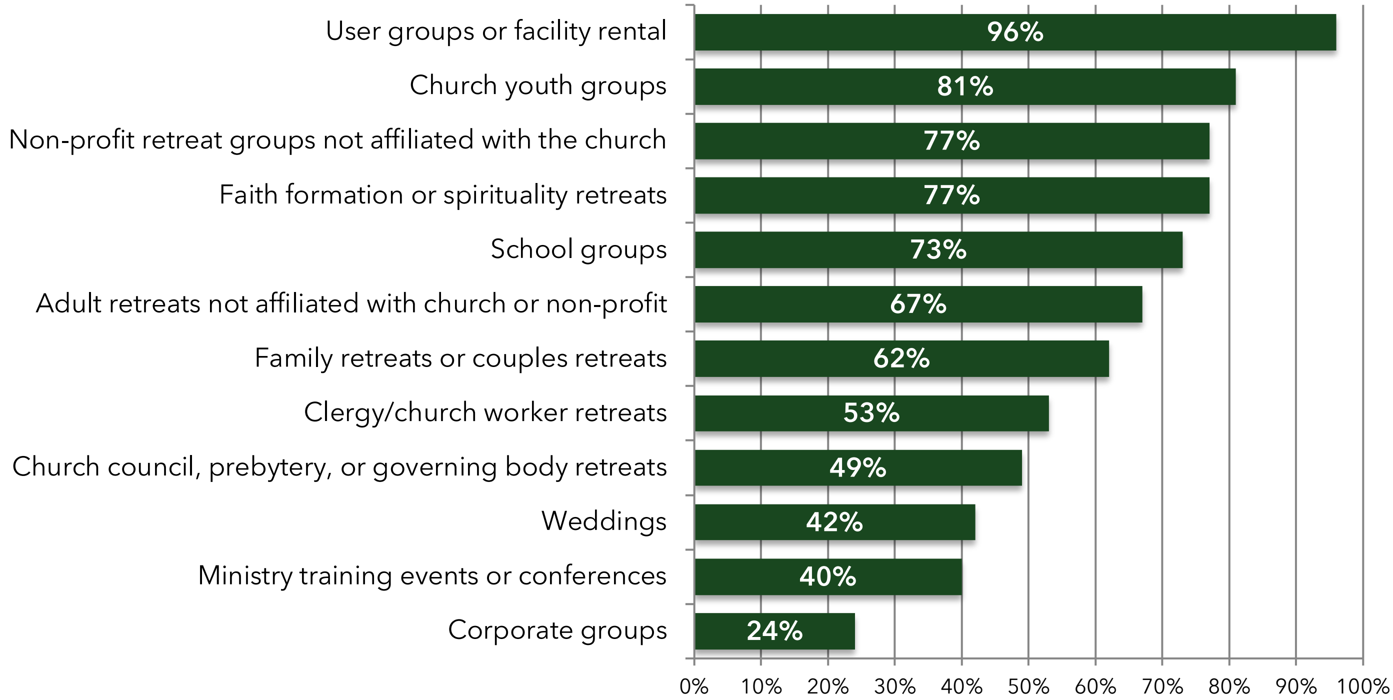


FIGURE 28B

The percentage of retreat/conference guests affiliated with a ministry center's constituent denomination(s) has declined since the question was first asked in 2016. In 2016, a third of camps (33%) indicated that more than half of their guests came from their constituent denomination(s), compared with only 27% in 2022 and 17% in 2024. On the low end, a third of camps indicated that 25% or fewer guests came from constituent denominations in 2016, compared with over half (54%) in 2024.

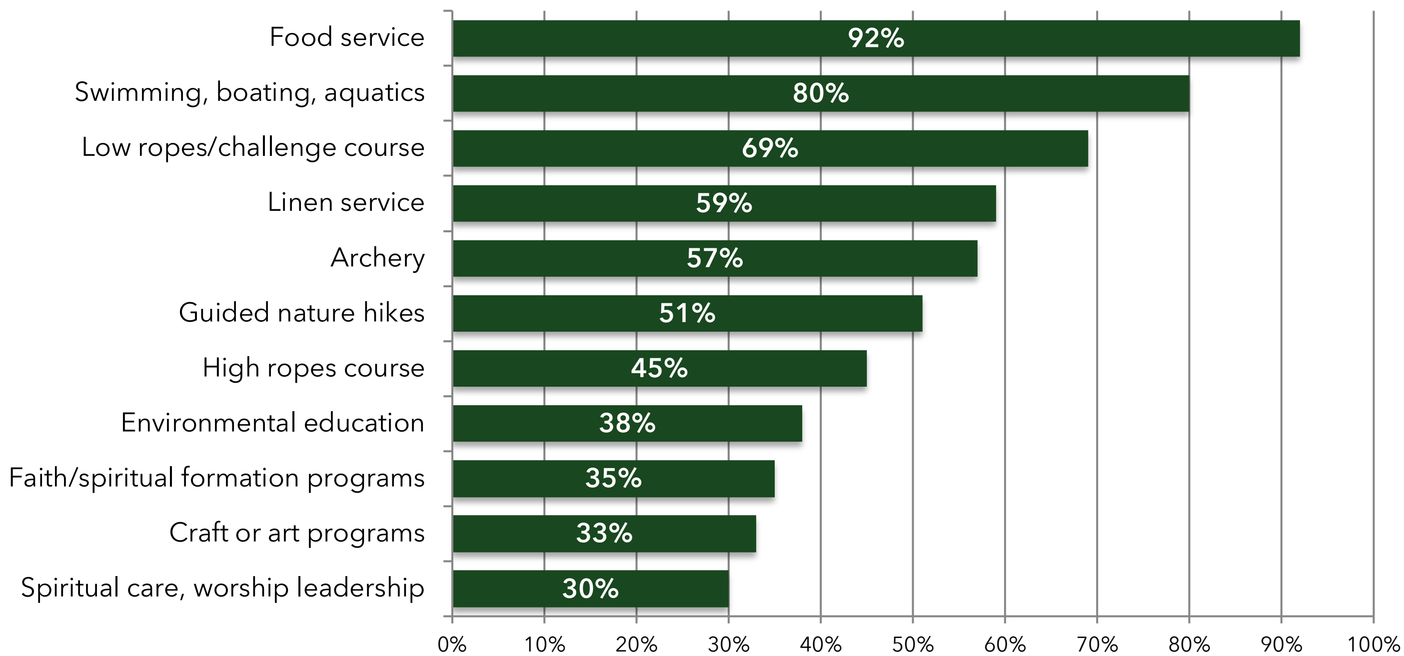
Retreat/Conference Center Programs Offered on a Regular Basis

FIGURE 29A, *n*=221



% Retreat Centers Offering Selected Retreat Amenities and Programs

FIGURE 29B, *n*=209



Most items remained largely unchanged from 2016 to 2024, with the exception of faith/spiritual formation programs, which have shown a gradual decline, and linen service, which has shown a steady increase (was 49% in 2016).

Overnight capacity for retreats/conferences

OUT OF **220** MINISTRY CENTERS

A quarter of ministry centers indicated that their overnight retreat capacity was fewer than 100 guests. Another quarter reported a capacity between 100 and 145 guests. Another quarter could accommodate between 146 and 209. The remaining quarter could accommodate 210 or more guests overnight. Average overnight capacity was 176 guests, slightly higher than the average from the 2022 survey (161).

Retreat/Conference Center Usage Trends

FIGURE 30

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>2016</th><th>2018</th><th>2020</th><th>2022</th><th>2024</th></tr>
<tr><td>90% capacity or higher on weekends</td><td>5%</td><td>11%</td><td>1%</td><td>11%</td><td>16%</td></tr>
<tr><td>75% to 89% capacity on weekends</td><td>20%</td><td>23%</td><td>1%</td><td>27%</td><td>29%</td></tr>
<tr><td>50% to 74% capacity on weekends</td><td>36%</td><td>34%</td><td>5%</td><td>32%</td><td>29%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Less than 50% capacity on weekends</td><td>39%</td><td>32%</td><td>93%</td><td>30%</td><td>26%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Much HIGHER than previous year (> 10%)</td><td rowspan="2">44%</td><td>9%</td><td>1%</td><td>37%</td><td>14%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Somewhat higher than previous year (< 10%)</td><td>37%</td><td>1%</td><td>36%</td><td>47%</td></tr>
<tr><td>About the same as previous year</td><td>39%</td><td>38%</td><td>3%</td><td>18%</td><td>29%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Somewhat lower than previous year (< 10%)</td><td rowspan="2">17%</td><td>13%</td><td>3%</td><td>5%</td><td>8%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Much LOWER than previous year (> 10%)</td><td>3%</td><td>92%</td><td>4%</td><td>2%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Highest of past 5 years</td><td>19%</td><td>19%</td><td>2%</td><td>12%</td><td>29%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Higher than most of past 5 years</td><td>29%</td><td>31%</td><td>3%</td><td>21%</td><td>39%</td></tr>
<tr><td>About the same as past 5 years</td><td>38%</td><td>37%</td><td>4%</td><td>30%</td><td>22%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lower than most of past 5 years</td><td>12%</td><td>11%</td><td>6%</td><td>34%</td><td>9%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lowest of past 5 years</td><td>2%</td><td>2%</td><td>85%</td><td>3%</td><td>1%</td></tr>
</table>

Prevalence of Retreat/Conference Center Amenities, by Annual Budget Category

FIGURE 31

	< $200k	$200k - $500k	$501k - $1 Million	> $1 Million	All Sites
Rustic cabins (without bathroom)	82%	56%	32%	41%	**45%**
Campground for tent, camper, or RV	59%	38%	29%	37%	**36%**
Modern cabins (bathrooms and temp control)	24%	66%	74%	76%	**68%**
Dormitory-style housing	41%	47%	65%	57%	**56%**
Hotel-style accommodations	18%	27%	44%	70%	**47%**
Large group meeting space (groups 100+)	18%	33%	42%	66%	**46%**
Linen service	33%	40%	58%	78%	**59%**
Food service	58%	85%	96%	99%	**92%**
High ropes course	8%	28%	44%	62%	**44%**
Low ropes/group challenge course	42%	59%	75%	76%	**69%**
Environmental education	25%	25%	30%	55%	**38%**
Craft or art programs (e.g. pottery)	8%	38%	30%	35%	**33%**
Spiritual care and/or worship leadership	17%	21%	35%	34%	**30%**
Faith formation or spiritual growth programs	25%	23%	38%	45%	**36%**
Guided nature hikes	33%	51%	48%	57%	**51%**
Swimming, boating, or other aquatics	58%	83%	78%	82%	**80%**
Archery	33%	60%	58%	57%	**57%**

Retreat Pricing

Average base cost for single overnight in hotel-style accommodations: $107 USD

- **Hotel-style** was defined as single/double rooms with private bathrooms and linens
- 47% of retreat/conference centers offered this type of accommodation (102 provided cost)
- When there was a difference between single and double occupancy rates, the single occupancy rate was used for the calculation
- Some ministry centers listed only a per building rental fee, and these were not included in the calculation unless they provided a maximum number of occupants
- A quarter of retreat/conference centers charged less than $70 for a single overnight in hotel-style accommodations, a quarter charged $71-$99, a quarter $100-$130, and the last quarter over $130 per night
- Only 4 Canadian ministries provided cost for hotel-style accommodations. The average overnight was $64.75.

Average base cost for overnight in retreat-style accommodations: $60 USD

- **Retreat-style** was defined as semi-private or shared bath and multiple people per room (these included a variety of housing options, from dormitory style to multi-occupancy cabins)
- The cost was calculated to represent the per-person overnight charge. In some cases, individuals were given discounts for multiple nights or off-peak nights. These discounts are not considered in the above average.
- Some indicated that meals were included in the overnight fee. In these cases, meal costs were subtracted from the overnight fee to represent the cost of just the overnight, with meals accounted separately.
- A quarter charged less than $35 for a single overnight in retreat-style accommodations, a quarter charged $35-$49, a quarter $50-$74, and the highest quarter charged $75 or more per night
- Only 7 Canadian ministries provided cost for retreat-style overnights. The average was $69.50.

Average meal costs:

92% of responding conference/retreat centers offered meal service to guests. While some incorporated the cost into the overnight fees, most of these also had a per meal rate. The majority of centers indicated that they charged separately for meals and lodging.

- Average breakfast cost: **$11.60**
- Average lunch cost: **$13.40**
- Average dinner cost: **$15.65**

Average Meal Costs, by Annual Budget Category

	< $200k	$200k - $500k	$501k - $1 Million	> $1 Million	All Sites
Average breakfast cost	$10.36	$12.00	$10.86	$12.18	**$11.60**
Average lunch cost	$11.07	$13.14	$12.60	$14.60	**$13.40**
Average dinner cost	$12.21	$14.73	$14.63	$17.58	**$15.65**

Outdoor Education Programs

29% of ministry centers indicated that they operate an outdoor school or outdoor education program other than those incorporated into regular summer camp programming

- Only a small number of these (4 of 61) indicated that the outdoor school was a separate 501(c)(3)

Staffing

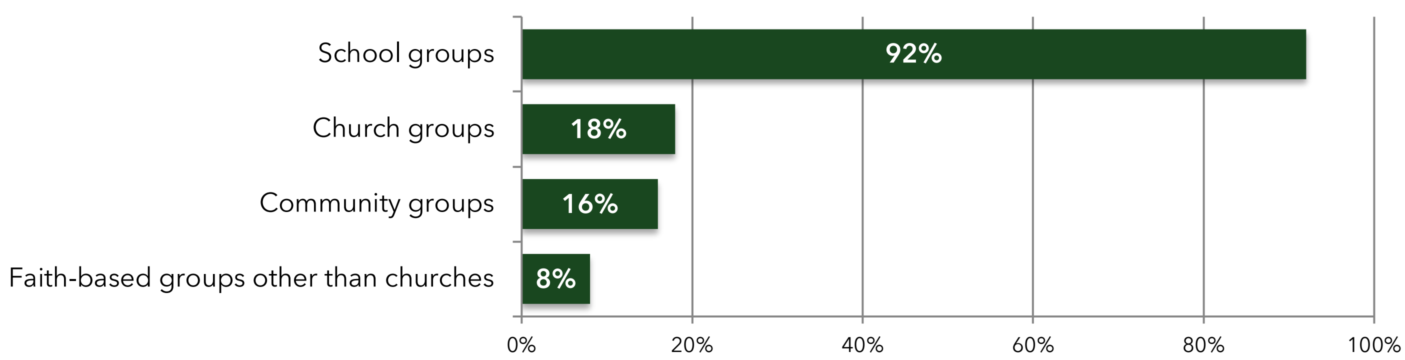
- About a third of outdoor schools did not employ any year-round staff, another third employed 1 staff member, and a third employed 2 or more staff people (10% employed 5+)
- Seasonal staff were more common. A quarter of outdoor schools did not employ any seasonal staff, a quarter employed 1-2, a quarter employed 3-4, and a quarter employed 5 or more. Some indicated that they only brought on staff for the specific time that the groups were present.

Rates

Rates for these programs varied widely, since some were overnight programs and others were single day programs. Individual ministry centers also indicated that prices varied widely from group to group, based on the needs of each group. The day rates were as low as $5-10 per student and others were over $100 per student.

Primary Clientele of Outdoor Education Programs

FIGURE 33, *n*=62



Garden Programs

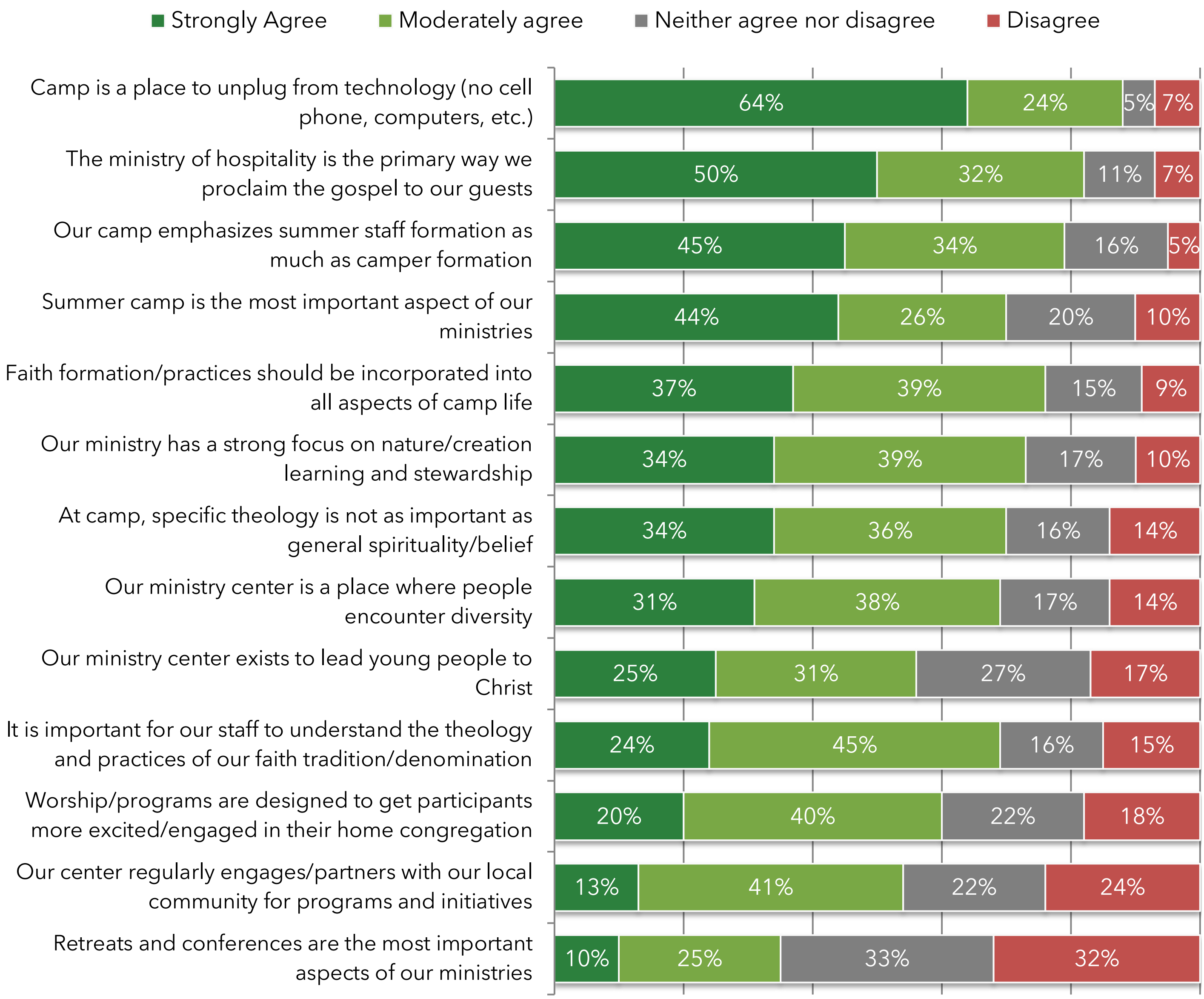
Almost a quarter (23%) of ministry centers indicated having a garden program of farm that they use to provide food for meals on site.

- About a third of these (7% of all centers) said that they regularly use food from the garden or farm in their meals
- The remaining two-thirds (16% of all centers) said they use the food only occasionally or for special programs

Ministry Center Philosophy

Level of Agreement with Philosophy Statements about Ministry Site

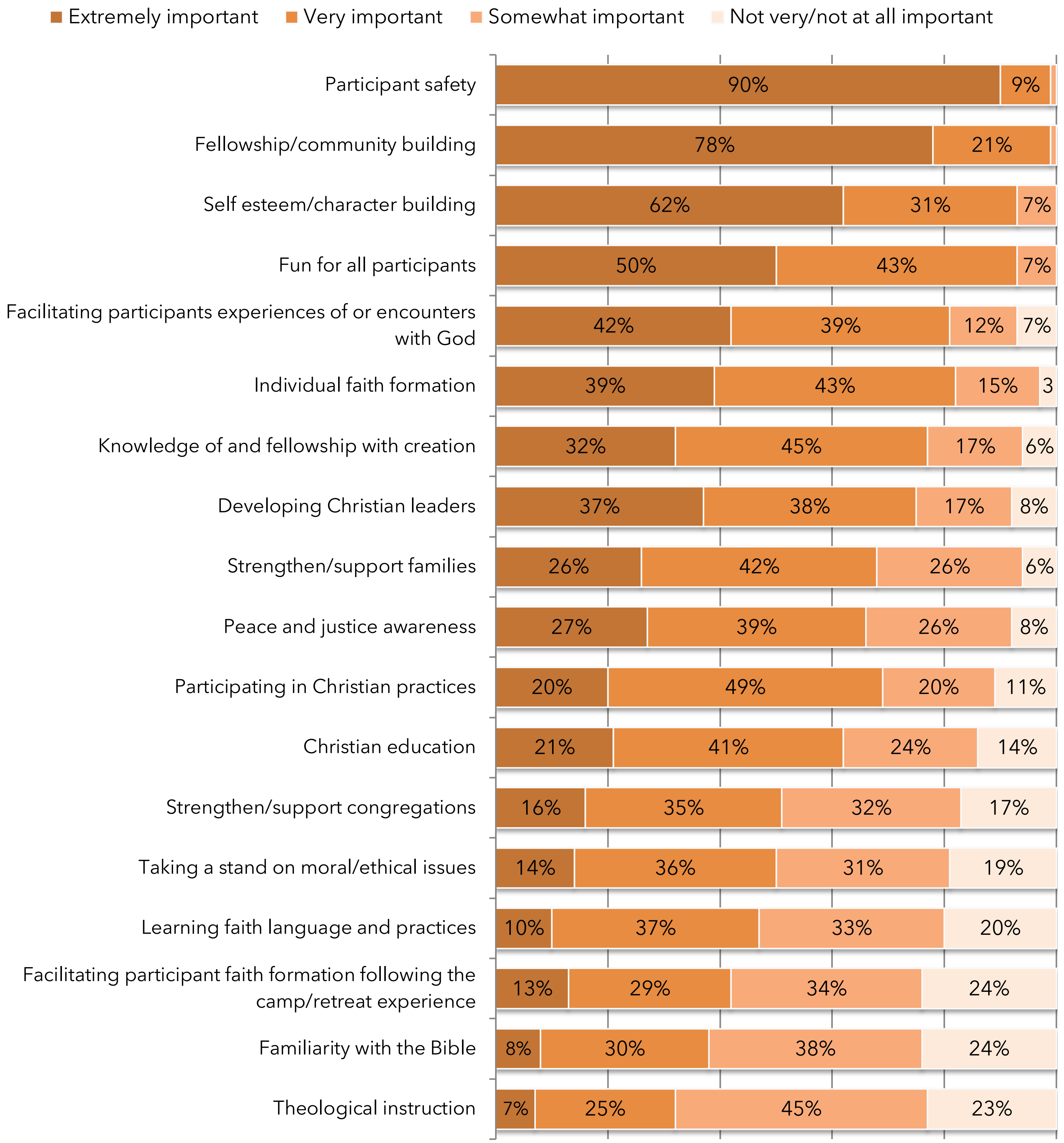
FIGURE 34, *n*=231



Level of Importance Assigned to Selected Program Priorities

listed in order of average importance

FIGURE 35, *n*=229



Changes in Philosophy Over Time

There have been several notable changes in ministry philosophy among OMC directors over the past decade.

General Decline in Faith-Centered Priorities

Most notably, there has been a gradual but steady decline in nearly all priorities that are overtly related to faith. There have been steady declines in average importance assigned to all the items related to Christian education: familiarity with the Bible, theological instruction, learning faith language/practices, and Christian education. There have been similar declines in items related to faith formation: individual faith formation, facilitating participants' experiences of/encounters with God, developing Christian leaders, and participating in Christian practices. Most emblematic and representative of this general decline is the change observed over time in average agreement with "Faith formation and practices should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life." In 2016, 88% of directors agreed with this statement (more than those who agreed that camp is a place to unplug from technology). By 2020, agreement had declined to 85%, and it dropped to 76% in 2024-25.

Corresponding Decline in Congregational Connection

Philosophical connection with partner churches/congregations and denominational bodies also declined over the past decade. In 2016, 76% of responding directors agreed, "Worship/programs are designed to get participants more excited about and engaged in their home congregations." Agreement declined to 69% by 2020 and fell to 60% in 2024-25. At the same time, the average importance assigned to "strengthen/support congregations" declined steadily each year of the survey.

Top 3 Priorities Remain Consistent

The top 3 priorities rated the most important, on average, have remained exactly the same since the survey first launched in 2014: participant safety, fellowship/community building, and self-esteem/character building. For the first time in 2018, "fun for all participants" was rated as more important, on average, than "facilitating participants' experiences of or encounters with God" and "individual faith formation." Fun for all participants remained the number 4 priority in 2024, followed by the other two. In summary, the top 6 priorities have remained the same since 2014, with fun moving up two spots from number 6 to number 4.

Increase in Prioritizing Unplugging

One of the only survey items seeing a general increase in agreement over the past few surveys was "Camp is a place to unplug from technology." Agreement with this statement saw modest decline in 2020 and 2022, but there was a significant increase in agreement in the most recent survey, perhaps reflecting the larger cultural pushback against the use of cell phones among children and adolescents, particularly in educational spaces. Agreement with this statement had declined to 81% among responding directors by 2022 and rebounded to 88% in 2024-25. It is notable that agreement with "Our ministry has a strong focus on nature/creation learning and stewardship" has remained roughly constant for the past decade.

SACREDPLAYGROUNDS.COM