

Hope for Meeting the Challenge of Camp and Conference Ministry, Part Two of three. by Robert R. Allen



Where Do We Go From Here?

Camp and conference ministries are facing old and new challenges. These include:

- difficult economic conditions,
- much attention given to differences in theology and church polity,
- less discretionary money and time,
- increasing percentage of elderly members,
- declining interest in “roughing it” for children and adults,
- growing interest in other areas of church ministry (not a bad thing— one we can help with),
- shrinking church membership,
- reluctance to invest in facility maintenance, renovation, or new construction.

The key questions for camp and conference leaders are:

1. Should the camp or conference ministry where you serve still be operating 5, 10 or 20 years from now?
2. If you believe a ministry should continue into the foreseeable future, what needs to be done and what needs to change to assure its viability?
3. How can what is special or unique about this ministry in general or at a specific setting best serve the church?

The challenges described below have been faced and met by others. Each section includes some suggestions that helped some ministries move from surviving to thriving. Perhaps some of the ideas will be helpful to the ministry center where you serve.

The Challenge? Professional Development: Continuing education and professional development for the director (CEO) is essential to keeping up with the growing body of knowledge and skills needed.

Hope for the challenge:

- Attend conferences offered by agencies related to your ministry such as The American Camp Association <add web link>, Columbia Theological Seminary <add web link>, and PCCCA <add web link>. There are many others that offer related education, certifications, and CEUs.
- Read / study helpful resources in the areas related to this ministry. These include: Adventure programming, Bible study, child development, Christian education, food service, green projects and technology, legal issues, psychology, recreation, safety, site development, theology, and many others.
- Challenge yourself. Strive to improve all your knowledge and skills, learn what is new to you, and innovate, invent, and experiment with program and services to keep you ministry relevant, vibrant, and unique.
- Take care of yourself. Remember and honor Sabbath, nurture family, stay healthy and fit, practice spiritual disciplines, honor Christian virtues.

The Challenge? Leadership: Managing all aspects of a camp and retreat ministry is complex and challenging. If one person doesn't understand the overall management and work cooperatively on the same mission and goals there will be deterioration in the quality of ministry. Staff incompetence or misconduct can seriously wound a ministry.

Hope for the challenge:

- Ministry is a service industry and it takes people to deliver the services. Recruit enough staff and/or volunteers to get the jobs done without burning people out.

- Recruit and hire persons of high integrity, strong servant-leadership motivation, healthy personality, theological integrity, and willingness to learn then teach them the other skills they need.
- Provide training, education, and encouragement for all staff, volunteers, and board members. Send people to get training and/or certifications useful to your ministry — archery, arts and crafts, aquatics, canoeing, sailing, trip camping, challenge/initiative/ropes courses, food service, horseback riding, environmental education, hospitality, and others as needed.
- Supervise and evaluate all paid and volunteer staff. Remember evaluation is a teaching/learning opportunity.

The Challenge? An Effective Board or Committee: Board/committee leadership needs a vision for, love and knowledge of, and commitment to the ministry to provide the needed guidance. While it may be necessary at times, the board/committee that micromanages the ministry will find it difficult to stay focused on the big picture, the mission, or the future.

Hope for the challenge:

- The board/committee should focus on mission, values, goals and ministry, be visionary about ways to serve, establish policies, attend and participate in meetings, contribute financially, represent the ministry to churches and the public, and evaluate performance of the Director(s).
- Other board duties will depend on needs and circumstances.

The Challenge? Crisis Management: A crisis may occur any time. We all seek to reduce risks but it is impossible to prevent all serious incidents such as food poisoning, an accidental death, or a suicide. But a well managed plan can shorten the recovery time and even enhance appreciation for the ministry.

Hope for the challenge:

- Be accredited by The American Camp Association.
- Get assistance to develop a crisis plan before a crisis occurs. Sources of help include: American Camp Association, American Red Cross, rescue and law enforcement agencies, a Crisis Counseling Team you have recruited, and insurance agents.

In addition to safety and emergency procedures, have the following for crisis management:

- Management of the setting – tending to the victim(s), moving non rescue persons away, and managing traffic.
- Collecting information for an incident report – Who? When? What? How? And statements from witnesses.
- Notification procedures – who calls whom and in what order such as family and authorities?
- What information is shared and when?
- Identify which phones are designated for calling out. Leave the published numbers open for incoming calls.
- How to manage the risks of cell phones and instant mass distribution of misleading or inappropriate information and photos.
- Have one designated person to determine what information is ready to be released, prepare a press release, and be the one to speak to the media.
- Plans for follow-up with family, churches, and others for as long as care is needed.

For more insight visit other outdoor ministry centers, attend PCCCA Annual Conferences, and participate in **PCCCA Focus Events**. • **PCCCA Annual Conference** , October 23-28, 2011, Mo Ranch Camp and Conference Center, TX.

- **The Consultants Network** is able to help with many areas of your ministry planning and decisions. To inquire about a consultation visit contact Rich Swartwood: (812) 358-3413, Pyoca Camp & Conference Center, 886 E. County RD 100 S, Brownstown, IN 47220, or e-mail: rich@pyoca.org. Ministries in Canada contact Gary Batty: (830) 238-3203 X 130, Mo Ranch Camp and Conference Center, 2229 FM 1340, Hunt, Texas 78024, or email: garyb@moranch.com Questions by phone or email to any of the Consultants Network members are free.
- **PCCCA Members** have access to many helpful documents @ <http://www.pccca.net/index.php>