

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



Even when built to last, care is needed.

### Camp and conference ministries are facing old and new challenges such as:

- economic stress,
  - more contentiousness in the world and the church,
  - less discretionary time,
  - increasing percentage of elderly members,
  - declining interest in “roughing it,”
  - interest shifting to other areas of church ministry
  - shrinking church membership,
- All of these may be things thing we can help with.

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 in your 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? Financial Management.** Operating the ministry within the income is essential to maintaining trust. When money is tight, tough decisions must be made.

#### Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- Do not spend according to the budget, spend according to the actual income! Once the budget is approved, develop a cash-flow spending plan.
- Simplify financial reports so non-accountants can understand and be guided by them.
- Set realistic fees that cover the actual cost. Price will relate to perceived value. A fee that is too low may suggest a cheap product, but a fee perceived as too high can cause people to shop elsewhere.
- Develop endowments for scholarships and upkeep.
- Raise the money you need before you build. If you must borrow, make sure the addition or improvement will generate enough *new* income to cover new operating costs *and* service the loan.
- Develop a business plan for each unit of site and for each program and service. This will help you evaluate the viability of each part of the ministry and make appropriate adjustments.
- Develop and maintain meaningful long term relationships with clients, staff, volunteers, and other individuals and groups interested in any part of the ministry. This is essential to funds development.

**The Challenge? Quality Maintenance.** When income falls short most are tempted to cut back on maintenance first. Deferred maintenance is the same as borrowing money. Every year that maintenance is delayed more debt is added with interest. Substandard care of a site will discourage participation and donations.

#### Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- Safety is first. Make sure safety standards are met and that guests feel safe. A well cared-for site will help reassure guests that you will care for them too.
- At least make frequent cosmetic improvements which can make a positive impression.
- Catch up on deferred maintenance before adding new maintenance responsibilities.
- In advance prepare a business plan (financial plan) to know how much a new building will

increase the overall expenses and how much use and fees will be required to cover those costs.

- Identify and/or recruit user groups then design renovations and new structures for where your mission and guests' needs intersect.
- Establish an endowment for perpetual care of the ministry center. Calculate the annual maintenance, add the annual portion of long-term replacement costs then multiply that by 20 to set the minimum endowment goal.
- If possible dedicate all memorial gifts to an endowment (care or scholarship) as the gifts that keep on giving, a perpetual memorial.

**The Challenge? A Discouraging Location:** Clients, especially new clients, may feel frustrated if the site is too difficult to get to. Distance is a deterrent for some. In some cases the “natural” aspect of a site is diminished by nearby development or internal damage (storm, flood, beetles, etc.). There is little incentive to “invest” in leased land —this is faulty capitalistic thinking because the investments in all church buildings are actually about the transformation of lives for Christ and his church, not bricks and wood.

**Hope for Meeting the Challenge:**

- Consider all possible compensations for a discouraging location —
- If getting to the site is discouraging, perhaps provide some transportation, change arrival or departure times; and make directions and signs more user friendly.
- If encroachment by development is discouraging, perhaps add border barriers such as fencing, trees and hedges, or raised landscaped berms in the more critical locations; keep buildings and trails away from the property line.
- If a small site is discouraging, bring the outdoors indoors such as a nature center/museum, a roomy recreation center, landscape to provide natural “rooms” for various functions such as worship.
- Offer such awesome services and programs that people will do anything to be there.
- Focus more on the enrichment experiences of guests and less on needs of site and facilities.
- Tell the stories of changed or enriched lives and the ministry's benefits to the church.
- Solicit financial support for the mission, ministry, and programs rather than buildings.

**The Challenge? Opposition:** There are at least a few people in every setting who do not know or accept the values of a camp and retreat experiences. These people may have enough zeal or influence to recruit others to join the cause for divesting the site. Some have proclaimed camps to be “a drain on the mission dollars of the church” rather than seeing it as a valid ministry in itself.

**Hope for Meeting the Challenge:**

- Welcome challenges as a way to improve.
- Listen carefully to opponents – they have much to teach you.
- Have personal one-on-one conflict-resolution meetings with opponents. It is much harder to oppose a friend.
- Be kind even if they continue their opposition. Overcome bad with good.
- Communicate the stories of how the ministry has improved or transformed lives of participants, and how the ministry can and does help them fulfill the ministry where they serve.

**The Challenge? Having a Viable Long-range Plan for the Ministry:** Lewis Carroll (1832–1898) author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* wrote, “If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.” A plan identifies where you are going and why; goals that will keep you on the right road, and the actions that will help get you there.

**Hope for Meeting the Challenges:**

- Ask for help often. Many people can help. PCCCA has designated a Consultants Network of men and women who have experience and skills beneficial to the planning process.
- Do at least annual evaluations of all aspects of the ministry and fix what you can as quickly as you can. Even small improvements can make a big difference.
- As least annually invite others to bring a fresh set of eyes to the evaluation process.

- Develop a realistic plan for recovery and/or development of the ministry —not just buildings.
- Include in your annual evaluation a process that will reconsider, modify, add or eliminate ministry elements to quickly make necessary changes to stay relevant to your God-given mission and needs of people, families, and churches.
- For more insight visit other outdoor ministry centers, attend [PCCCA Annual Conference](#), October 23-28, 2011, Mo-Ranch Conference Center, TX. and participate in **PCCCA Focus Events**.
- **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: (866) 251-2267 (toll free), 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) 238-4455 ext 230, 130, Mo-Ranch 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](#) .