

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



Where Do We Go From Here?

It may be so obvious that it may not need saying but here it is anyway. **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? Discerning your Mission. A clear mission statement tells everyone why this ministry is needed – the essence of what it does to make the world a better place.

Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- Celebrate where you’ve come from but look forward to where you are going.
- Establish a mission statement which is clear, memorable, and makes a promise to the church / the people you serve.
- Annually review your mission and all aspects of performing the ministry.
- Appoint, elect and hire leadership who will focus on fulfilling the mission by honoring core values, accomplishing goals, and implementing programs and services.

[A sample mission statement summary based on Montreat Conference Center’s mission is “• STRENGTHENING CHURCHES • BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS • GROWING DISCIPLES”]

The Challenge? Christian Hospitality: Scriptures call for compassionate hospitality in circumstances where welcoming sojourners was a matter of survival. Welcoming and serving guests is an essential program element of all camp, conference and retreat ministries. When done well the personal needs and program goals of guests are more effectively met. Quality hospitality can compensate for less-than-ideal site and facilities.

Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- Help everyone feel welcome, and free from confusion and anxiety at every gate, door, and path.

- Provide special training for persons responsible for hospitality.
- Develop partnerships with groups, churches, and agencies who have compatible missions.
- Instruct all who represent the ministry in any way (board/committee members, seasonal and permanent staff, volunteers, and all who do or report anything for the ministry).
- Find ways to say “yes” to at least 90% of guests’ requests. This may require negotiating an alternative but satisfactory “yes.”
- Look for excuses to say, “Thank you.” Say “thank you” at least twice as often as you say “please.”
- When someone complains, say, “Thank you for telling me,” then respond to their basic concern. Make corrections as appropriate.
- Provide easy ways for guests to evaluate and suggest improvements. A simple single-fold BRC (Business Reply Card) is one possible tool. To get good answers, ask good questions.

The Challenge? Quality Program. Program is clearly a major part of the ministry and done well can increase participation and support.

Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- Provide thoroughly trained leadership with adequate guidance and supervision to continually enhance program integrity.
- Leadership development of program staff is a major component of the ministry with tremendous benefits for the church.
- Evaluate and avoid program elements that foster fear, devalue people, use manipulation, or otherwise do not support the stated mission, goals, and values.
- If activities suggested by other sources do not fit your mission, adapt them so they will help fulfill your mission, affirm your values and accomplish your goals or do not use them.
- Evaluate how well your programs and services are meeting the needs of the people you serve.

The Challenge? Marketing: Informing people about your ministry so they feel confident that their participation will be a blessing.

Hope for Meeting the Challenge:

- How well is the name known? Is what people to associate with the name what you intend?
- Is the right information going out to the right people at the right time and in the right form?
- The key to successful marketing is building long term relationships. Perform the hard work of maintaining healthy relationships with church leaders, members, clients, guests and potential guests?
- Share the stories of transformed lives or have persons tell their own story of enrichment or transformation that occurred through your ministry.

For more insight visit other outdoor ministry centers, attend PCCCA Annual Conferences, and participate in PCCCA Focus Events.

- Maintenance Connection, February 7-11, 2011, Pyoca Camp, Conference & Retreat Center, IN.
- Kitchen Connection, February 28, 2011, Menucha Retreat and Conference Center, OR.
- **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>

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



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](#), [Columbia Theological Seminary](#), and [PCCCA](#). 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 programs 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 a camp and retreat ministry is complex. The director(s) cannot do it all and does not need to know it all. Each person will contribute more when they understand the overall management and work cooperatively on the same mission and goals. 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, healthy personality, (do background checks) strong servant-leadership motivation, theological integrity, and willingness to learn. Then
- Provide training, education, and encouragement for all staff, volunteers, and board members. Send them to get training or certifications useful to your ministry including any program activities, food service, hospitality, maintenance, and others as needed.
- Supervise and evaluate all paid and volunteer staff. Remember, mistakes and evaluations are a teaching/learning opportunities.

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 families, churches, and others for as long as care is needed.

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

Robert R. Allen

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.



You are a Light to the World.

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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.
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