

EMERGING AND GROWING TRENDS

A look at several trends in core disciplines across Christian camping



We asked CCCA members to share with us some of the things they see emerging or trending in their area of core discipline. The responses covered a wide range of ideas and topics, many of which were emerging even before COVID, and a lot surfaced as a result of the pandemic. We've done our best to narrow them down to a few responses in many of the core disciplines. You'll notice that we left off a couple of the disciplines here; those can be found in the columns later in this issue.



Photo courtesy of Mount Hermon (2019)

Photo courtesy of The Firs (2020)



Let's take a look at several of the core disciplines in Christian camping and discover what's trending and emerging. ►

Programming

Scavenger Hunts

While these are not new ideas, scavenger hunts came up in several replies from program directors at CCCA camps. Glendon Carper is the activities program director at Sandy Cove (North East, Maryland), where they initially added a scavenger hunt as a family activity option in 2019. “It allowed families with varying ages to participate in an activity together, as a family,” Carper explains. It went well because Sandy Cove then used that scavenger hunt for additional program events throughout the year. Carper went on to say, “We also added an indoor scavenger hunt option for those who didn’t want to go outside,” or when the weather isn’t conducive. They plan to add at least one more hunt this summer “because of the need to create activities that are family centered, do not require staffing and create an outside/socially-distanced option,” Carper shares.

Carper’s team has been using the Actionbound app to host their scavenger hunts, which has options to create several different clue types:

- Quiz (i.e.: count the number of slides on the playground)
- Find a Spot (input coordinates or pinpoint a physical location, then provide a clue that leads participants there)
- Mission (e.g.: take a picture of your family by the pool)
- Scan a Code (find QR codes we’ve placed in slightly hidden locations)
- Survey (used mostly just for fun, but asked things like, “What’s your favorite snack shop item or favorite family camp activity?”)

Carper says they chose Actionbound because it worked best with what they wanted to accomplish, and had a reasonable price (they have educational/nonprofit rates). He explains, “It allows you to activate the scavenger hunt at a specific time, allows unlimited players (although you purchase a license based on the number of users you anticipate) and provides results ... if you want to create a competition and give out prizes.”

For Reilly Melin, camp ministry assistant at WLD Ranch (Girard, Pennsylvania), scavenger hunts have long been part of the programming for summer camps, retreat groups (such as Girl Scouts) and even staff. However, Melin says they were inspired by the team scavenger hunt at CCCA’s national conference in Orlando in 2019, where groups had to take photos when they got to each point in the hunt, to create more intense variations on scavenger hunts.

In addition to being fun and interactive for people of any activity level, “This type of activity also provides us with an easy way to collect fun and more personal pictures for social media and end-of-week slideshows,” Melin says.

Incorporating scavenger hunts as part of their summer staff training, Melin says, “We created questions that dove into the history of the camp, such as, ‘Where would you have gone to get a Snickers bar in 1985?’ or ‘Take a photo with Wayne Leonard Davis’ brother.’ (WLD Ranch is named after Wayne Leonard Davis, whose untimely death led to the founding of this camp and his brother still lives just off property.) Not only was this a fun part of the scavenger hunt, but it also prompted the staff to learn and care more about the history of the camp and those involved in it.”

Inclusive Programming

When it comes to programming, “If our camps aren’t inclusive, they are exclusive,” says Abby Banfield, program consultant at Grace Adventures (Silver Lake, Michigan). “Just as Jesus welcomed all to come to Him, we should be building environments and programs where all feel welcome.”

Dan Steele agrees. “[Jesus] included everyone in His ministry — even those that society placed on the outskirts — Christ had the simple call: Come.” Steele, director of marketing at RVR (Manchester, Maryland) asks, “Do our camps’ staff, culture and activities beckon kids with the same welcoming call — come?”

Whether talking about race, culture, socioeconomics or physical or mental ability, programming should be intentional about including all people. Banfield explains, “When someone sees a camp specifically for them, they may be willing to come, even if traditional camp isn’t appealing.”

Your programming informs your marketing, and it’s important that what visitors to your website or social media channels see represents what the campers at your camp look like. For Steele, it was visitors to their website that prompted new marketing material. Once, after visiting the camp’s website, a woman of color voiced concern, saying, “I’m wondering if my child will feel comfortable at camp.” Steele says, “That eye-opening encounter prompted several purposeful website edits.”

Steele offers ideas to help reach more campers from lower-income families. “Offering current camper families the option to sponsor a second camper for the summer will bless not only the recipient, but also the family who generously gave.”

Banfield has seen the long-tail effect on Grace Adventures’ staff as a result of being intentional with inclusivity. “A former staff member who is now leading a Deaf ministry has started partnering with us to bring her interns who are Deaf to volunteer at camp,” Banfield explains. “We’ve had to stretch creatively at times, but our eyes and hearts have been opened to a whole new unreached people group and ... we’re more motivated than ever to have them [here].”

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Specialty Programs

Many camps and conference centers, pre-COVID, already had unique adult program options available to groups. We know camps and conference centers that host retreats for quilting groups, hiking groups, family camps, horsemanship camps, men's and women's retreats, etc. At Calvin Crest (Oakhurst, California), post-COVID regulations put a limit on who they could host. Christina Melahn, program director at Calvin Crest, said their leadership team aimed to answer the question, "Given the constraints in place, who can we serve this summer?" The answer they came up with was "Pathfinders," a camp for adults over 55 who have been vaccinated. Taking ideas and inspiration from men's and women's retreats they host in the off-season and brainstorming new possibilities, the camp plans to offer activities such as guided hikes and bike rides, birdwatching, table games, workshops and seminars on topics like art, building and gardening, aerial adventure course, guided reflection and prayer activities and more. They're bringing in speakers who will help guests focus on the idea of thriving in life during the second half of their lives, and are marketing Pathfinders to churches.

Selling Experiences

There has been a trend as of late to give experiences rather than gifts. The move toward minimalism and against materialism and acquisition of "things" has caused parents and friends to look for experiences that would bring joy and value to someone. Airbnb has even begun marketing experiences alongside accommodations, providing people with an opportunity to learn a new skill, try their hand at baking or barbecuing or investigate the history of a locale. As camps consider providing more value to families, asking what skills and expertise camp staff have that guests might be willing to pay for could be a way to serve with enhanced hospitality and excellence while also creating a memorable experience. ►



Photo courtesy of Camp Blessing (2015)



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon (2019)

Marketing

AI and Machine Learning

According to marketing expert Charles Lee, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning will be driving forces shaping marketing and design. Think of things like Amazon's "other things you may like" suggestions or Netflix's suggestions of movies and shows for you. It's all based on machines learning your patterns, interests and wants, and then catering to those things by offering you what the AI thinks you'd like. In marketing, you may see this play out through Google, Facebook or YouTube ad algorithms. Anything you've liked or clicked or watched on the internet is now viewed by AI as something of interest to you, so sites will begin showing you ads based on those interests. Consider the ways you can be taking advantage of the "brains" inside the machines by using digital advertising designed to reach people who have expressed an interest in what you have to offer.

Audio and Video

Emerging trends point to audio-based content with the new app Clubhouse, and with Alexa and Google. While Clubhouse is very new (and not even open to the world as of the time of this writing), the app will offer a unique way for people to "gather" and communicate around a specific topic of interest. It remains to be seen exactly how it will be used for marketing as the app continues to develop and grow, but keep an eye on it in the near future. Alexa and Google offer ways for people to use their voices to search for things they need or want, rather than the old-fashioned way of typing it into a web browser. Ensuring that your website is optimized for voice SEO will make it easier for people to find you with a voice search. Think of phrases people would speak when looking for what your ministry offers — this might be different than what they'd type into a search field. In an article on www.smartinsights.com, businesses are encouraged to focus on being conversational, think like the user to generate the right keywords and prioritize question keywords. (You can learn more at www.ccca.org/go/digital_marketing)

According to SocialMediaExaminer.com, "Video marketing is still one of, if not the most important marketing trend today and likely for the next five to 10 years." We're well beyond the days when YouTube was considered the only video platform. Now, just about every social media platform allows you to upload videos or do a live video broadcast. Remember, when doing video for social media, vertical videos work best since most people are using their phones to scroll through their social media feeds. On your website, landscape video can still work beautifully, and it is essential for your website to include video. "If your site includes video, it's *50x more likely* (50 times!) to drive organic search results compared to text," according to Social Media Examiner.

Personalization

According to Social Media Examiner, "63% of consumers are highly annoyed with generic advertising blasts; 80% say they are more likely to do business with a company if it offers personalized experiences." Kevin George from EmailMonks asserts that "personalized, triggered emails based on behavior are 3x better than batch-and-blast emails." If you're not already using an online email platform to do your email marketing, you're missing out on features that could help you offer a more personalized experience for your potential and existing customers. Mailchimp offers a way to set up a series of emails triggered by people's actions. You can send out an email blast with two different programs or products featured, then, based on which option is clicked on, a new series of emails targeting the person with that specific interest can be triggered. If you're collecting first names when people sign up to receive emails from you, it's simple to add personalization to the emails by addressing people by their first name. ►

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Photo courtesy of Camp Summit [2020]



iStock / raksyBH

Street food, healthy food-truck options and small bites are all ways this generation has been able to sample a variety of food at one meal.

Foodservice trends at camp often reflect what's trending in the broader restaurant and food world. We've watched food sensitivities move from an anomaly to an area where camps are expected to adapt and accommodate. Gluten-free is not only a request, but parents expect monitoring and assurance that their camper who is gluten-intolerant or dealing with celiac disease will be safe in your dining room.

Rosemary Valencia from Mile High Pines Camp (Angelus Oaks, California) talks about the challenges of meeting the variety of needs and preferences of campers, "We've learned that there are some groups we just can't serve well. We used to provide Kosher meals for our Jewish guests and began to realize we just couldn't do that well. But, we have found a way to accommodate other guest groups' needs including working with them to build the menu, using their provided recipes or, in some cases, inviting them to cook with us."

Preparing for guests with special dietary needs or requests, Sky Ranch's (Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado) foodservices senior manager, Heidi Hays, says, "We have a form that our guest fills out (that they can get on our website or from the coordinator who is planning their event). From that form, it generates an Excel sheet that I receive daily for the upcoming week of special diets or preferences." With trends leaning toward accommodating special requests, automating in this way is helpful in streamlining your processes.

Being prepared and understanding what your campers and guests may be expecting from your dining hall can feel overwhelming. Hopefully, this list of trends impacting foodservice will help you!

Plant-based Food

More and more people are going to a plant-based diet, and many of them fall in the camper age group. From 2014 to 2017 there was a 60% rise in veganism in the U.S. (www.ccca.org/go/veganism). With the rise of great-tasting, easily accessible meat substitutes, providing a plant-based option for your campers is now about more than just providing rice and beans. Thriving Goods, a CCCA program providing savings on food and non-food items, has been tracking this trend and has options available for camps as they create tasty menu options. Meat substitutes that actually look like, cook like and taste like meat are now readily available.

Socially-conscious Eaters

Generation Z is especially motivated by socially-conscious brands. They are also very aware of food-production ethics and may be more discerning about where their food comes from. Don't be surprised if campers ask questions about the ethical treatment of animals, environmentally-conscious farming and supporting local growers with the purchase of food. Case in point: The harvesting of palm oil and the damage to the environment — a hot topic for Gen Z.

For Rene Otto, foodservice director at SpringHill's Michigan location, she sees this more with counselors than with campers. However, she explains that the company they use for all their food purchasing has sourcing information on their website.

Street Food and Ethnic Specialties

This generation of campers has more access to a variety of foods than any other generation in the past. They also expect it to be delivered quick and hot. Street food, healthy food-truck options and small bites are all ways this generation has been able to sample a variety of food at one meal. Korean street tacos, Mexican street corn (elote) or a spread of tapas might be fun ways to incorporate these trends in the camp kitchen.

Keto, Paleo and Clean Protein

The trend of high-protein diets has not waned. As you plan your menu, make sure there are options for a camper to have a mostly-protein, low-sugar diet for those who are committed to this lifestyle. SpringHill's Otto always makes sure that a salad bar option and clean sources of protein are available.

Individually-packaged Foods

COVID has brought many changes to the dining room. One that may have staying power is the need to provide pre-packaged, individual servings of food. Food vendors have adapted many of their offerings to provide camps with easy-to-use and cost-effective options.



Foodservice

Food Sensitivities and Allergies

Being aware of food sensitivities and allergies is not just something parents expect camps to be aware of, they expect camps to be responsive and protective of their campers. Parents also expect tasty alternatives that their campers will like. Some camps have leaned fully into a kitchen with dedicated prep areas to ensure there is no cross-contamination and have developed menu items that are allergy-safe. Other camps have felt they do not have the bandwidth to deal with complicated and dangerous allergies.

Rene Otto, foodservices director at SpringHill's Michigan location, has been in foodservice for 25 years, most of which have been at camps. She's employed by Creative Dining, which is a hospitality management group located in 14 states across the U.S. "I've definitely seen an uptick in allergies and special diets in the last 25 years," Otto says. She keeps options for typical food allergies (gluten, dairy, egg, soy) on hand at all times. For items she's not able to purchase through the camp's vendor, Otto requests that parents send in labeled food items, which are stored in a special cooler. In addition, when food allergies are extreme, Rosemary Valencia from Mile High Pines Camp (Angelus Oaks, California) recommends encouraging parents to provide the food packed and labeled for each meal so they can have the confidence their camper is safe.

Heidi Hays, foodservices manager at Sky Ranch's (Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado) biggest camp, has found a key resource when dealing with food allergies. "Our food vendor has a dietician on staff, and I lean into her knowledge on menu planning and resources," Hays explains. When planning in advance for guests with allergies, Hays says, "I take opportunities to speak with our guests who have the allergies about how they personally handle [their diet] at home. This allows me to learn about products and foods they use."

Our friends at Thriving Goods offer important reminders about food allergies. "According to a recent study of 500 hospitality workers by the software provider Fourth, one in six respondents claimed they had not received regular training or updates with regard to managing guest allergies, Big Hospitality reports." In addition, "among 1,000 consumers also polled as part of the survey, 36% of respondents said their last restaurant meals contained ingredients not listed on the menu."

It's essential that your staff be properly trained in handling food allergies and that you keep a detailed list of ingredients for all the dishes you prepare (pre-made or homemade). As someone with food allergies, I (Jen) found it incredibly helpful when a camp I attended handed me a binder with the ingredients list for each item at each meal (tucked into clear plastic sleeves). It made it easy for me to identify the things I could eat, and helped the kitchen staff offer alternatives or modifications that would make an item safe for me to eat.

Some other tips from Thriving Goods: "Isolate allergens in storage and preparation areas, cook allergen-free foods first and change utensils after each item, wash hands thoroughly after handling allergens, change aprons or uniforms when there is a contamination risk and clean preparation areas and equipment well after handling allergens."

While not a food allergy per se, campers with diabetes can sometimes present a unique challenge for camp kitchens. Otto has been at SpringHill for a couple years, but is not at a point where she has all the numbers for every meal. "Sometimes I have to scramble and find all the values," Otto explains. But she understands the importance of this information and wants to be prepared to meet the needs of all the campers who enter SpringHill's dining hall. ►

With a mock resume, prospective staff can develop a better understanding of what they'd get out of a summer serving with your ministry.

Human Resources

You've likely had a conversation when you're recruiting for summer camp and a candidate says their parents want them to get a "real job" instead of working at camp. They express their need for professional experience to beef up their resume. They've missed the best resume builder there is — growing their leadership, project- and people-management skills while serving at camp.

Travis Badding and his team from Camp IdRaHaJe (Bailey, Colorado) created mock resumes for all their summer staff positions. They identified specific skills and experiences their staff would gain throughout their time at camp and channeled those into bullet points. During CCCA's Program RoundTable, Badding said, "You could [take] that other internship or you could come work at summer camp, and you'd almost get the exact same experience." With a mock resume, prospective staff can develop a better understanding of what they'd get out of a summer serving with your ministry.

As you're recruiting, capitalize on the practical, employable skills staff will gain from working at camp, and deliver them in a way that's easy to showcase their experience afterward. There are gifts and abilities that can apply to a variety of professional fields, and they can be refined in a summer camp setting. Imagine the transferrable skills your staff can take with them, and craft a sample resume to reflect what they will learn during their time on staff.

Skills to include on a mock resume might include:

- activity planning and oversight
- adaptability
- child care
- communication
- handling pressure
- leadership
- organization skills
- problem-solving
- public speaking skills
- strong work ethic
- teamwork
- time management

To go further, consider implementing sample interview questions as part of their exit interviews and coach them on possible answers. Questions and prompts you might include:

- Name a time when you had to make a hard decision.
- How would your previous co-workers describe you?
- Describe an instance when you had to work with someone whose personality was different from yours.
- When was a time you failed, and how did you move forward?
- Why should we hire you? ►



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship (2019)



Photo courtesy of Inspiration Point Christian Camp and Retreat Center (2019)



Facilities

COVID has had a major impact on the availability and cost of building materials, according to architects at Fletemeyer & Lee Associates. Dave Lee explains that the pandemic caused supply chain and manufacturing problems. “Particularly, saw mills stopped cutting wood. Products were harder to find, which drove prices up,” Lee says. Lumber prices typically go up in the spring and rebound a bit in the fall, but Lee says he’s not sure that will happen this year. Even the dry-wall market is in flux, according to Josh James, project manager with Fletemeyer & Lee Associates.

James and Lee suggest alternatives such as light-gauge metal studs for framing, gypsum decking products and fiber-cement siding (called Hardie board) for exteriors. While more expensive than wood siding, Hardie board is low-maintenance and durable, lasts longer than wood and is available in a variety of patterns and stains. Another alternative, which doesn’t always fit into a camp’s natural aesthetic, is metal siding. (This has been a trend in commercial buildings for a while now.)

Prices aren’t skyrocketing with pavers or concrete masonry units (CMU) like concrete blocks. Lee says they use concrete blocks in place of stone masonry when pricing is an issue. “We use concrete blocks on exterior walls of buildings. Split-faced block units have rougher texture, but look organic,” Lee explains. He says they’re available in different colors and sizes and are mixed up to get a nice look.

Both Lee and James believe that this may not be the best time to launch into new construction projects, but is a great time to work on other projects. “It may be an appropriate time to do site, landscape, exterior projects, road work, utility work, etc.,” Lee says. They advise that camps wait until the fall to revisit building. Prices may not drop dramatically, but the availability of materials and laborers is generally much better in winter months than summer months.

Many camps have already begun to make changes to interior spaces as a result of COVID in an effort to make those areas safer for guests. If you’re looking for ideas to improve your interiors, watch the Excellence in Training webinar Dave Lee presented in November 2020 at www.ccca.org/go/eit_lee. The presentation includes emerging technologies that can sterilize the air, designs that support social distancing and more.



Operations

Sustainability

We've seen a trend toward sustainability and energy conservation across the country. The implications for camps and conference centers are significant. Dave Lee, architect with Fletemeyer & Lee Associates, believes Christians should be leading that movement, not following it. He points out that "if camps can save money on energy bills, they're also being good stewards of God's creation." He explains that energy costs are going up at a higher rate than normal inflation. Focusing on sustainable and green design and energy sourcing could help set a property up so it's not as dependent on those high-cost energy sources.

In many states, sustainability is something that is being mandated as new laws are put in place. For example, in California there was a new law passed requiring solar power grids on most new construction. Evan Liewer, camp director at Forest Home Christian Camps and Conference Center (Forest Falls, California), says he "started working with a solar team to figure out if we should build a solar farm. After they did a detailed assessment, they said we weren't ready." According to Liewer, there were too many inefficiencies that needed to be addressed first. He says they're working their way through the items that need to be addressed, and then will move on to having solar where it matters.

Josh James, project manager with Fletemeyer & Lee Associates, suggests that a lot of materials could be sourced from camp properties. He says camps could bring in a mobile lumber mill to create lumber from trees on the property. Lee is currently working on a dining hall at Camp Zion in Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, that is being constructed using stone from the property. In both these scenarios, camps can save costs by sourcing materials from their property, saving on delivery fees, but also minimizing their carbon footprint.

For many camps, composting and gardening have been in practice for years. Others are starting to identify the benefits, not only to sustainability, but also to cost savings and healthier eating. At Deer Run Camps and Retreats (Thompson's Station, Tennessee), foodservice director George Moran shares that they started a vegetable and herb garden on site recently. "We are minimizing the variety to maximize the effect on our food cost," Moran explains. "We are also saving food waste to use in our compost." Aside from health benefits and food cost savings, "it will also impact our environment ... and gives us the opportunity to develop this program as something that can be shared with our campers."

Cost Reductions

Ray Demich, director of operations at Lake Geneva Camps and Conferences (Lake Geneva, Wisconsin), says their leadership team met last fall to brainstorm cost-saving decisions they could make. These include things like: move to stipend rather than fully-paid health insurance (resulting in five-figure annual savings), LED light installations, a new reservation software that will save the camp \$30–40k annually, deactivating old email addresses, renegotiating contracts with vendors, etc.

The staff at River Valley Ranch (Manchester, Maryland), has moved to using Microsoft Teams since COVID began in 2020. Executive director Jon Bisset explains, "We have used it for our internal communications, project organization, video calls, to-do lists, meetings, file storage and more." Bisset shares that Teams has helped the team collaborate more efficiently. The best part? "We have taken advantage of Microsoft's nonprofit program to get Office 365 (including Teams) for free."

We heard from several camps that found cost savings by involving volunteers in the maintenance and upkeep of their properties. Ministries such as SOWER and ROAM create partnerships between people (typically retired) who show up at a camp and park their RV on-site in exchange for volunteer work around the property. By offering support with construction, remodeling and maintenance, these volunteers help keep facility costs down, and it only costs the camp an RV hookup and food (if they invite the volunteers to use their dining hall). ►

Architect Dave Lee advises that camps wait until the fall to revisit building. Prices may not drop dramatically, but the availability of materials and laborers is generally much better in winter months than summer months.

Leadership

Collaborative Leadership

Several leaders agree that the traditional model of top-down leadership may not be a viable style for the future of their ministries. According to Jason Wilkie, executive director at Camp Siloam (Siloam Springs, Arkansas), they are experimenting with a collaborative model of top-level leadership that is described as a “Circle of Equals” with a “Primus” (Latin for first among equals).

“I became intrigued with this model after reading a book called *Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf,” Wilkie explains. “I read somewhere that poor leadership can destroy, in two years, what good leadership built over 20 years. I was thinking and praying about how to protect against this scenario at Camp Siloam. Collaborative leadership seemed to be an effective way to minimize the impact of poor leadership.”

For Tom Graney, executive director at New Life Ranch (Colcord, Oklahoma), the future generations of leaders are the reason he began looking at shifting his model of leadership. “Gen Y’s and Z’s ideal leader is a supporter and collaborator,” he explains. He says it’s given people more ownership over the ministry. “It’s giving us the opportunity to develop more leaders within New Life Ranch, and to hopefully launch some to other ministries.”

Ken Bontrager is the executive director at Camp Deerpark (Westbrookville, New York), and admits that as a Boomer with a dominant leadership style, he sees a need to shift to a more collaborative model of leadership for the future of his ministry. “I want to be ahead of the curve on that and not painfully blindsided by it 15 years from now,” he explains. He says, “If we are expecting 20-somethings to move into leadership, step up and take responsibility, we need to have them be central in the decision-making process.”

This concept is not new. Graney points to Exodus 18, where Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, tells Moses it’s not good for him to try to do it all, and that he should empower others to lead and make decisions. Wilkie references Matthew 20:20-28, where Jesus laid out what it meant to be a leader, ultimately saying that to be great, you should lead like a servant.

Wilkie says the transition has been difficult. “Making decisions as a team of leaders requires submission

and humility. It is most difficult on the CEO, who has to yield his or her right to override a decision.” At New Life Ranch, for Graney, letting go and letting others lead and make decisions has been a challenge. Graney shares, “We certainly haven’t mastered it — and might get it wrong more than right — but I believe this is the best direction, and we’re committed to continuing to learn and adjust as we do.” Bontrager acknowledges the personal challenge this shift has been for him, but says, “I think it is Camp Deerpark’s best path forward to set up the next generation for success in ministry.”

Emotional and Mental Health of Self and Staff

In recent years, mental health has surfaced on the radar for staff and leaders in Christian camping, but COVID seemed to bring it into sharper focus. Nate Stafford, executive director at El Porvenir Christian Camp (Montezuma, New Mexico), says that as a result of the pandemic, he was “feeling very disconnected with others and depressed. I didn’t [want] to carry it alone.” As a result, he reached out digitally to leaders outside his organization for his emotional well-being. Platforms like Zoom and Marco Polo helped him connect virtually and face to face. “Seeing another person’s face has emotional, mental and psychological benefits, even if it’s on a screen,” he shares.

In a group he meets with virtually, they spend time checking in on each other’s emotions. “No one is allowed to offer advice or speak over another person’s time. This has been a lifeline for me!” Stafford explains. He encourages other leaders to make those valuable connections, saying, “Don’t struggle alone; it doesn’t work.”

Beyond caring for their personal mental and emotional health, leaders are also seeing a greater need to provide support for their staff. Nate Parks, president and CEO at Berea (Hebron, New Hampshire), brought in an expert from The Red Cross to train the entire staff in mental health first aid. “It was a good experience,” Parks shares. “My hope to was increase the sensitivity of our whole staff and give them tools to help aid in the life journey of both campers and staff on site, and to take care of each other.”

At Laity Lodge Family Camp (Kerrville, Texas), senior director Cary Hendricks has done something

“My hope to was increase the sensitivity of our whole staff and give them tools to help aid in the life journey of both campers and staff on site, and to take care of each other.” —Nate Parks

similar. “We have secured the services of a mental health consultant. She is a licensed clinical social worker and knows our organization well.” Hendricks explains that staff training includes a presentation on mental health awareness, where the mental health consultant “equips staff to identify mental health issues which need attention.” She also is contracted for time during the summer to be available for formal or informal counseling sessions with summer staff. “Many of the staff have taken advantage of our mental health consultant and have continued pursuing mental health resources at home, after camp, due to their experiences at camp,” Hendricks says.

Garret Larsen, CEO at Camp Cho-Yeh (Livingston, Texas), also brought a mental health professional onto the team to serve both year-round and summer staff. Because of an aggressive growth streak since 2014, Larsen and his team realized that many of their new staff were 20-somethings from all over the country. “They’re out of their support systems,” Larsen explains. Recognizing that several were struggling with mental illness, he wanted to find a way for the camp to help.

His wife, Kelly, is one of only two licensed counselors in town (and the other wasn’t taking new patients). She did some work during grad school with the camp’s summer staff, and once she became a licensed professional counselor in 2015, the board authorized the camp to contract with her to serve full-time staff. “At first, people thought it might be awkward having the counselor married to the boss,” Larsen shares. But because of doctor/patient confidentiality, nobody even knows who Kelly is seeing unless that person talks openly about it.

Camp Cho-Yeh offers full-time staff 12 free counseling sessions per year, and will cover half the cost of any additional sessions a person might want to have. During the summer, Kelly offers her services for free to summer staff, offering mental health training and counseling for any summer staff in need.

All three directors express the importance of paying attention to and caring for the mental health of their staff. They all say that having an emphasis on mental health care has helped to destigmatize mental health issues and create a safer place for people to work through whatever they may be dealing with. ►

Photo courtesy of Camp Cho-Yeh (2020)

Mental Health Initiatives

One camp’s efforts to improve mental health

■ by Abby Banfield

One of 2021’s buzz phrases is *mental health*. It’s common for our staff to share articles to help us learn, grow and identify trends. In late 2020, we noticed a clear trend of mental health emerging, and instead of just reading about it, we formed a task force to purposefully seek out what the experts were saying and form a plan for our ministry.

After reading various sources, a few patterns and critical issues emerged, such as loneliness, increased depression and anxiety, media and economic stress and family breakdown. None of these are new; we recognized that the pandemic didn’t create these issues but heightened things already there.

Our research also showed several commonly recommended strategies to improve mental health:

1. Enjoying the outdoors
2. Exercising regularly
3. Eating nutritiously
4. Connecting with others
5. Serving others
6. Practice of gratitude
7. Creating a normal routine
8. Limiting media exposure
9. Spending time with God
10. Trying new skills

The great news was that camp is already clearly designed to support mental health! The next steps were to examine our existing programs and intentionally identify ways to integrate these strategies even more into our ministry. Each team member was tasked with examining his or her area of responsibility in light of these 10 strategies and identifying what is already happening to help support mental health, what could be implemented easily and what new ideas could be added in the future. Our marketing team is taking those findings and increasing communication to parents, churches and schools about how camp supports good mental health.

People are seeking answers and support, and we believe that camp is one of the best tools out there. How are you building strong mental health practices into your ministry?



Abby Banfield is the program consultant at Grace Adventures (Silver Lake, Michigan). A camp kid herself, she is passionate about camping ministry and providing experiences for people to encounter God. Abby enjoys puns and being outside with her family. You can reach her at abby@graceadventures.org.

Leadership continued

Sharing Ideas

Emily Bergandine, director of member engagement at CCCA, says, “This community of more than 8,000 camping professionals brings a wealth of knowledge. Association benefits aren’t limited to the resources and buying power programs we develop at the national office. Networking was listed as the most valuable benefit of CCCA membership in the 2020 Compass Survey. It’s part of our job at the national office to curate content, make introductions, facilitate conversations and promote opportunities for members to network. When we’re able to meet in-person again, the national conference and sectionals are excellent ways to meet other camping professionals. We developed Cohorts by Core at national conferences to connect people with similar job descriptions. We’ve expanded the opportunities for live conversations outside of conferences. RoundTable virtual calls with a facilitator have already connected dozens of people with shared goals and challenges. Watch for more RoundTable calls coming soon. You can also keep the conversations going with other members through Camp Forums.”

Laura Pierce, executive director at Evans Creek Retreat (Lyons, Oregon), says that collaboration and sharing ideas with other members has been a great resource for her ministry. She explains that through relationships built at national and sectional events,

she has saved time and money on research through the sharing of ideas. In addition, “Lessons learned by others help avert or avoid failure, and may even help deal with mistakes already made,” Pierce says. She appreciates the encouragement that comes along with this stance, when camps can recognize they’re not in competition, but are all working together in unique ways to share the Gospel and change lives.

We heard from several camps that said that they’ve begun sharing ideas even more than before because of COVID. Scott Larsen, executive director at Twin Lakes Bible Camp (Manson, Iowa), points out that “the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 created dialogue between ministries that did not exist prior, and it has lingered.” He says that because camps that were able to open in some form during the summer of 2020 were faced with the question of *how*, there was a sudden need to connect with other camps to see how they were planning to open. “A group of at least seven camps [in our area] talked regularly and shared research and conclusions,” Larsen explains. He says the ongoing impact is that those camps now have open lines of communication. “[We’ve] been sharing about things other than ‘flattening the curve.’” He also attributes the recent collaborations with improving the quality of interaction at sectional events.

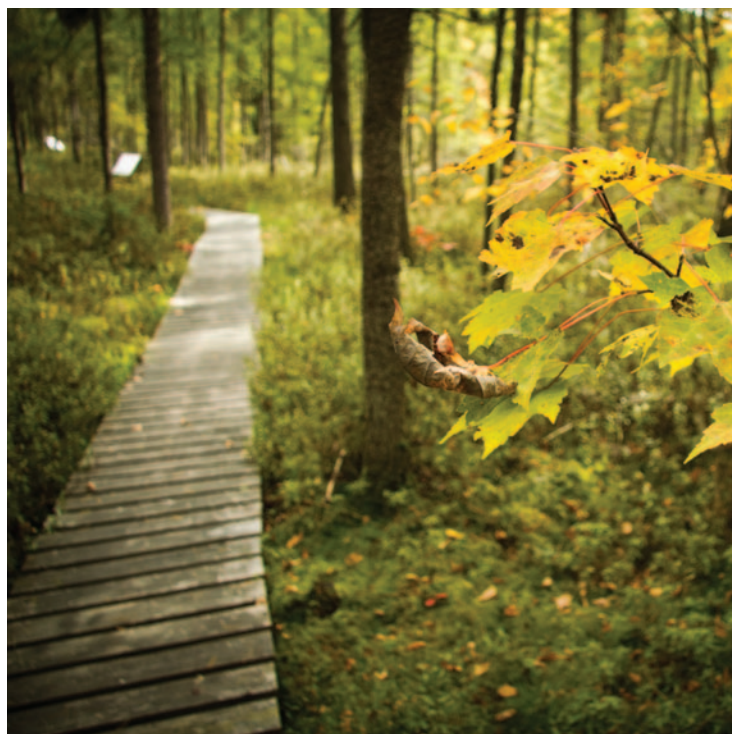


Photo courtesy of Forest Springs Camp and Conference Center (2010)

“We must reexamine the way we lead and redefine strength itself. COVID-19 has ushered in a new template we should be following when recruiting our managers and team leaders. Those with highly developed ‘soft skills’ will be the ones who take our organizations into the future.” —Erin Joy

Emotional Intelligence

EQ is not a new fad, but it's a growing trend in leadership. According to the Institute for Health and Human Potential (IHHP), the term *emotional intelligence* was created by two researchers, Peter Salavoy and John Mayer, in an article they wrote in 1990. It was later popularized by Dan Goleman in his 1996 book, *Emotional Intelligence*. The site defines EQ (or EI) as “being aware that emotions can drive our behavior and impact people (positively and negatively), and learning how to manage those emotions — both our own and others.”

In a ChiefLearningOfficer.com article, business coach Erin Joy says that the pandemic revealed where leaders' emotional intelligence measured up — and where it didn't. “We know that effective leaders must be in tune with the emotions of those around them, as well as their own. But rather than being a ‘nice to have’ trait, emotional intelligence is now mission-critical. In the pandemic, these skills were put to the test,” Joy explains.

Joy goes on to say, “For so long, our idea of strong leadership has been shaped by strict delegation and direction, where managers lead the way and employees dutifully follow. As we continue to grapple with disruptions to our businesses and personal lives, this perception has evolved, as managers who remain effective have noticed a shift in what new leadership requires. We must reexamine the way we lead and redefine strength itself. COVID-19 has ushered in a new template we should be following when recruiting our managers and team leaders. Those with highly developed ‘soft skills’ will be the ones who take our organizations into the future.”

IHHP says, “It's a scientific fact that emotions precede thought. When emotions run high, they change the way our brains function, diminishing our cognitive abilities, decision-making powers, and even interpersonal skills. ... At work, emotional intelligence can help [people] resolve conflicts, coach and motivate others and create a culture of collaboration.”

EQ improves with age, as people acquire more life lessons and develop more life skills. It's also a skill that can be learned. Becoming a better listener and more empathetic helps you increase your EQ. Our editorial team at *InSite* heard through the grapevine that Chris Radloff, vice-president of programs at Camp Cho-Yeh (Livingston, Texas), leads with a great deal of EQ. When asked about it, Radloff replied, “While people have consistently told me I am good in this area, the reality is that I just try to understand people and treat them well, at the same time giving guidance to others to do the same. My experience is that pride most often prevents success.”

Lisa Olson, director at Carolina Creek (Huntsville, Texas), believes there's more of an awareness of EQ, and as a result, the camp is “smart about screening, hiring and training to EQ.” Olson also points out that her experience shows that in the past, campers lived and responded out of their IQ, but now, “kids live in and respond out of their EQ, though both are equally intelligent and emotional.” She says that today's campers require “counselors who get that, and who will engage [campers'] emotional experience, not just their intellect.” ►



Family Reunions and Unique Retreats

We heard from a number of camps and conference centers who have seen an uptick in family reunions being booked at their facilities. Some have been hosting family reunions for a long time, and others are just venturing into it because of the ease with which COVID precautions can be implemented for those groups.

At Village Creek Bible Camp (Lansing, Iowa), like many other camps, COVID caused them to pivot in 2020. “We publicized that we had some weekends set aside for ‘Friends and Family,’” says director Camie Treptau. “Families jumped on the opportunity.” Village Creek was able to serve families alongside other campers, offering programming and foodservice. According to Treptau, families who came “shared that it was the best family reunion experience they have had. [With] something for everyone and meals being prepared, they all were able to relax. They encouraged us to open up camp for them again.”

Wallowa Lake United Methodist Camp (Joseph, Oregon) was struggling financially years ago, so they reinvented camp to meet the needs of families and adults. They “built 13 deluxe wooden yurt cabins (all donated and built by volunteers), [which] include bathrooms, log beds, linens, mini-fridges and microwaves, dishes, carpeting, skylights and handmade quilts,” says Assistant Director Peggy Lovegren.

As a result, they host a number of unique groups including senior hiking groups, an adult dulcimer camp, quilting and scrapbooking camps, along with youth groups, church family camps and family reunions.

Lovegren’s passion for the last 10 years is working with the Nez Perce (Nimiipuu) Tribe, who once called the camp’s grounds their homeland. “We have added many things to the camp to make it special for the tribe, including teepees they authenticated.”

When it comes to family reunions, Lovegren says she is “careful to screen families to make sure they are a ‘good fit’ for our camp’s mission, ministry and policies.”

A lot of the family reunion business that Wallowa Lake receives is due to word of mouth and a conference newsletter. They are also listed on the local Chamber of Commerce website.



Guest Services

Clean and Kind

COVID has put a greater emphasis on keeping facilities clean and working to control the environment. The question arises, “How can you still be hospitable when you’re enforcing important new protocols?”

Calvin Lindsey, programs director at Caraway Conference Center and Camps (Sophia, North Carolina), says that beyond state and local mandates that need to be followed to help prevent the spread of COVID, there are extra steps that can be taken to help a guest feel confident that measures are in place to provide a safer experience at your property.

One idea is “having a seal on the door of the room the guest is staying in, so they know it has been cleaned (and when),” Lindsey suggests. He experienced this at Bonclarken Conference Center (Flat Rock, North Carolina) and appreciated not only the seal on the door, but also the fact that once inside the room, the clean bedding was placed in a Ziplock bag to prevent many hands touching it. Lindsey adds, “You might say, ‘Well, now the guest has to make their own bed.’ But in a COVID-aware society, this didn’t come across as inconvenient to me.”

Chip Sherer, president of Bonclarken Conference Center, wrote an article that was included in his denomination’s magazine that highlighted all the efforts the conference center is making to create a safer environment for guests. In addition to explaining how guest rooms are being cleaned and prepared, he also explained how dining has shifted to a buffet served by staff with a partition between guests and staff, and how they’ve implemented a contactless registration process including electronic payments, contactless key pickup and online guest waivers. Sherer shares, “Our guests have commented that they appreciate the steps we have taken for safety and mitigation purposes. These steps have not changed our guest experience in any way. What has changed our guest experience is enforcing our state’s guidelines on face coverings and social distancing.”

Another way Lindsey sees hospitality being impacted is the realization that people want and need more human interactions. “Never before has seeing a smile on one’s face meant so much,” Lindsey states. “Having staff be available and seen is so important now.” He adds that “the genuine nature of one’s voice can be the biggest thing that carries welcome, excitement, kindness and hospitality.”

He advises sending guests the current mandates and protocols that are in place at your facility in advance of their arrival. Be willing to do a phone or Zoom call with anyone who may have additional questions. “Each state’s mandates may differ,” Lindsey offers, “but in most cases, asking the guests to follow the guidelines set in place when they can, and to be respectful of others’ space” will go a long way.

High-touch Hospitality

Even before COVID quarantines caused people to desire more human interaction, an expectation for high-touch hospitality has been on the rise. Calvin Lindsey, programs director at Caraway Conference Center and Camps (Sophia, North Carolina), believes that high-touch hospitality in Christian camping is “being relational and having a partnering/serving attitude when preparing for the arrival of a group and when actively serving the group.” He offers several ideas for low-cost efforts that result in high-touch hospitality:

- Handwritten cards or letters
- Social media recognition (commenting on or tagging posts about the group)
- Texting services (with updates, instructions, etc.)
- Recognizing clients outside of your property (in the community)

“These are extremely low-cost, but effective ways to build the personal side of business relationships,” Lindsey says. ►

“Having staff be available and seen is so important now. The genuine nature of one’s voice can be the biggest thing that carries welcome, excitement, kindness and hospitality.”
—Calvin Lindsey

Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon (2019)



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon (2016)



Ultimately, trends in boards of directors are helping to make boards healthier, more representative and more invested in the ministry for which they serve.

It used to be that nonprofit boards were either comprised of people with high financial net worth and the ability to give, or were pastors who were thought to bring spiritual wisdom to the table. More recently, boards, including camp boards, have become more strategic with board appointments and development.

Ultimately, trends in boards of directors are helping to make boards healthier, more representative and more invested in the ministry for which they serve.

A few of the trends we're seeing in camp boards include:

Diversity

Working to recruit and appoint more women and people of color in board positions. Adding board members who represent the diversity of people you serve ethnically and positionally (parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors) will help you better understand the unique needs of your constituents.

Breadth

Recruiting board members from a cross section of professional, ministry and community backgrounds. Having people who can bring their expertise and wisdom to the table in a variety of professions makes the board stronger and provides more protection for the organization.

Engagement

Providing board members with opportunities to engage with the camp or conference center beyond just giving. Introducing board members to the staff so they can pray for them more specifically, having a board workday, inviting board members to visit camp or participate in programs at camp can help the board member be more connected and invested.

Core beliefs

Boards have been encouraged to refine and memorialize the organization's core beliefs and distinctives, and to make sure they are published.

Board development

Finding ways to make board life rewarding and enriching. Board members are busy; does their involvement on a camp board feed them in any way? Camp leaders and board development committees are looking for ways to add value to board members, to build a board culture that enhances the member's life.

Board assessment

Measuring the effectiveness of each board member and the board as a whole. Each board member can ask and measure how they're doing as a member of the board and how the board is doing as a community. Boards are pinpointing what it looks like to be a thriving board and what characterizes a healthy, contributing board member. Measuring this helps everyone understand the expectations and rise to the occasion. ■



Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent two summers working at a camp in Michigan, where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward more than 25 years and now Jen works as a marketing consultant and editor of InSite magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colorado, with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.



Leah Gooderl serves as the marketing/communications specialist at CCCA, combining her interests of writing, camp and creativity throughout her work. As a former camp kid and summer staff member, she finds great joy in her role with CCCA.



Penny Hunter has been a marketing consultant for 30 years, working with major U.S. companies and nonprofits and leading campaigns for feature films. She also served as a vice president for International Justice Mission. Follow her on Twitter @pennyhunter. Email her at hunterpg@gmail.com.

Boards