

Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program
Final Report Grant # 1999 2178-000
Prepared by Dr. Karen-Marie Yust, December 2005
Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education

Introduction

When Lilly Endowment Inc. conceived the Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program (ICMEP) in 2000, it did so with a strong sense of the significant role Christian camps can and have played in the religious formation of American young people. The original request for proposals cited camps as “places where children and youth – and even adults – experience a quality of life in Christian community that shapes their faith in profound, even life-changing ways.” The request also acknowledged that “the experience of living with others in a religious camp setting can also be an important opportunity for young people to develop their leadership capacities and a sense of personal vocation.” Current church leaders and seminarians are as likely as not to be former campers, and many first experienced a sense of call to Christian vocational ministry while at church camp.

Recognizing that these ministries, like Christian congregations, often struggle financially to maintain and improve their infrastructures while also investing time, energy and money in program development, the Endowment instituted a competitive process by which camps in its home state could dream big in terms of building projects, staff development and ministry opportunities. And dream big they did. As a result of their visioning and hard work putting together thoughtful and innovative proposals, twenty-one Christian camping organizations, representing twenty-three camps, shared the Endowment’s \$12.4 million investment in Indiana camp ministries. This report describes and explores some of the significant discoveries made and lessons learned over the next three to four years as these camps refined, implemented, and evaluated projects designed to support and expand ministries of education and formation of young people in the life of Christian faith.

The Overwhelmingly Good News

Receiving a \$600,000 grant is incredibly good news, and many of the grantees also discovered that the reality of implementing all the elements of a large and expensive project in a three-year period overwhelmed staff members and existing organizational structures. Camps expressed this realization in a variety of ways:

It was the surrounding and pervasive impact of the grant process that stretched this organization at times beyond a comfortable level of its paradigm for growth. ...To another ministry I would commend a thorough look into what areas in your organization may be impacted by such a grant process. (Camp A)¹

We realized quickly that the amount of energy to manage this was far greater than we had anticipated. ...Plan to commit a considerable amount of camp staff, camp

¹ All quotations taken from ICMEP grantees’ final program reports unless otherwise noted.

board, and other volunteers' time and energy to the planning, management, and evaluation of the grant. (Camp B)

It was difficult to manage a project of such a grand scale while also managing a full on camp operation. (Camp C)

We found ourselves rapidly migrating from a "mom & pop" business to a small business. We didn't have staff trained in this transition nor did we have a good infrastructure to support the growth and change. (Camp D)

The time commitment that has been necessary by the Director of Camping Ministries as the Grant Project Manager has made it clear that a position of Grant Project Manager should have been built into a grant of this magnitude. (Camp E).

Camp A and Camp D went into some detail about the degree to which their operations were affected by the grant process. Camp A described how it had to make changes in its operating database, camp constitution, accounting procedures, support staff needs (in relation to additional program staff and increased building maintenance), and reliance on volunteer expertise. Camp D recommended that any future grant program of this kind "should require an assessment of the impact of the grant on programming, support structures, staffing, technology, policies and procedures, communication, maintenance, and funding prior to commitment," because these were areas of unanticipated difficulty.

Some camps wondered whether projects of this magnitude might best succeed if the person given responsibility for oversight of the grant project was not also a regular camp staff member with other concurrent management and program responsibilities. Camp E and Camp B suggested that camps need to hire a "grant project manager" to handle implementation details. There is certainly merit in seeking outside assistance in managing the details of a major building and program development project, especially in organizations with small and already overworked staffs. However, there is also a danger in moving oversight of a project out of the hands of those most involved in casting the vision for the project and determining how that vision will be lived out in practice. Other camps offered different solutions to coping with the overwhelming nature of capital and program improvements. Camp D wondered if, "with the hiring of a qualified consultant, some of these job changes and adjustments might be dealt with in a more pro-active manner." Camp C realized that program development would have gone more smoothly if responsibility for those elements had resided with "one or two key people" on the camp or denominational board whose job was to see "that the project stays on target" by closely coordinating the efforts of a larger group. Camp A proposed that camps plan a brainstorming session with a diverse group of stakeholders in order to anticipate and discuss the potential effects of future major projects. Camp A also discovered that camp staffers were not well equipped for leading large fundraising campaigns, and that hiring professional help in this area complemented its efforts in other areas. ***These combination approaches, where professional consultants and key stakeholders come together with camp staff to achieve broader ownership and oversight of a major project will, in the long run, better serve the mission and goals of camp ministries than an outsourcing approach will accomplish.***

Several camps also discovered that three years is too short a time in which to implement major building projects *and* significant program development components in a small-staff

organization. Almost all of the grantees postponed some aspect of their program development proposals after contending with facility construction cost and time overruns. Several grantees requested and received six-month or one-year extensions of the grant period to accommodate delays in implementation. Given other issues I will discuss later in this report, *a grant period of four years was frequently essential to the program development phase of the projects.*

A Catalyst for Organizational Change

As camp leaders reflected on the effects of their involvement in ICMEP, half of them explicitly noted that the implementation of their grant projects necessitated a closer look at their mission, purposes, and/or organizational structure. The concern for clarifying or transforming the organization's mission or purposes took both general and specific forms. Some camps reported that their projects sent them back to the basics of organizational life:

Although our reason for existence was clearly defined, this program has caused us to delve more deeply into our true purpose. (Camp F, whose Board decided to rewrite its mission and purpose statement)

Although we already knew the importance of encouraging faith formation and leadership development, we have learned that reinforcement and goal setting for developing new ways to accomplish those goals are very important. (Camp G)

[The Board] is undergoing a visioning process which will someday result in the further expansion of our ministry and God's kingdom. (Camp H)

[The grant-writing process] helped us to strengthen underdeveloped and poorly articulated goals from the [Camp B] Board. We now realize that pivotal details would have made significant differences in fulfilling our goals for the grant. (Camp B)

Other camps offered more specific examples of purposes tested and strengthened during project implementation:

The building of the conference facility has forced the camp leadership to look more seriously at the partnerships which God has been calling us to...As such, we have formed more intra-denominational partnerships than we have in the past. (Camp D)

Our work points up the need for coordination of the camp experience with the home parish experiences so one program can build on the strengths of the other to create in young people a sustaining faith and belief in God. (Camp I)

[On developing patience:] Once a new [] program and direction is planned..., regardless of the attendance response, it needs to be allowed to grow. (Camp J)

One camp realized at the end that greater attention to mission and purpose, especially in terms of helping stakeholders understand the relationship between new projects and the organization's mission and participate in the project, would have facilitated a smoother implementation of their goals.

An area that could have used more strategy from the start was the development and implementation of the faith formation or confirmation retreats...An even deeper understanding and ownership of this project may have been achieved had there been an official group from the board of directors designated to help with its oversight. (Camp A)

Although Camp A was the only grantee to reflect at length on this discovery in its final report, several camps throughout the four years of ICMEP echoed this important point as they negotiated for support from various stakeholders during the implementation of their projects.

Direct investment of board members and key denominational leaders facilitates program development; the education and involvement of these persons deserves high priority if camp ministries are to evolve and grow.

Organizational structure was a major area of change for some camps, meaning significant growth for at least one camp and resulting in difficult decisions about staff changes and reorganized lines of communication for others. Camp K moved from a part-time camp director to a full-time camp manager, assisted by a part-time marketing director and several paid college interns each summer, as well as a full-time professional builder during the construction phase of the project. Previously, the camp had operated with only volunteers and a caretaker. As a result of this shift, “the infrastructure of our total program was strengthened, our dream of a full program of ministry for the entire year became a reality, and our intention to become more responsive to the spiritual needs of our constituency in a changing culture moved forward.”

Camp D had a bumpier experience with staff change, reporting, “Of the full time staff that was at the camp at the start of the grant process, only one staff member remains. The staff felt a huge impact in relationships, workload, and job responsibility changes.” However, Camp D has used this experience to strengthen its administrative culture by introducing a different way of understanding staff leadership.

We are in the process of developing a new staff structure based on a shared leadership concept...the staff roles and relationships were not well enough defined to effectively handle the high velocity change we encountered with the construction and completion of the new buildings. Roles have been better defined and areas of overlap have been identified so that they can be managed.

This type of response demonstrates that ***camp ministries need a combination of resilience and innovation in order to meet the challenges of their missions in the twenty-first century.***

Camp A experienced a different kind of staffing issue that affected its ability to implement new program developments. They discovered that a newly hired staff member whose portfolio includes responsibility for ongoing programs had little creative energy left from learning the “old ways” to develop new ideas. Citing the pressures of managing “the learning curve” in relation to “the ongoing program”, Camp A said of its new program director, “only after he felt like he had a handle on the scope of that aspect of the position could he move to formulating this new program of confirmation retreats.” This understandable approach raises a question about whether responsibility for the development of new programming should reside solely with a new staff member. ***Integrating new staff members into existing stakeholder***

groups responsible for nurturing the development of new ideas would eliminate some delays in implementation related to staff turnover and expansion.

Too many organizational groups with a formalized role in the implementation process can, however, create obstacles for program development that camps find frustrating. Camp C noted, “Our system of boards and committees actually became a hurdle for us to overcome. It inhibited communication and lead to work not getting done.” Furthermore, disruptions in denominational leadership can have a negative affect on project communication, as Camp C explicitly noted in its report and other camps cited from time to time during conversations with ICMEP staff members. ***Camp ministry projects need to be structured so that they strike a balance between denominational accountability and freedom to experiment with ideas consistent with the camp’s mission and purposes.***

Camp F offers sound advice for all camps seeking to avoid a period of desert wandering in relation to ongoing program development. It counsels, “Make sure your vision is clearly and cleanly defined. We made improvement on what we already had in this area. If we had begun without a clearly defined vision, we would have wandered aimlessly through this process.” It is worth emphasizing, however, that a lack of clarity at the beginning of a project does not doom a project to failure. Several camps realized that their visions needed greater development and testing and found effective ways to rethink and retool for a more faithful and effective outcome. As Camp C discovered, “by not becoming too attached to any one idea, we found new ways to help campers discover their potential.”

Which Comes First, the Building or the Program?

With the exception of Camp I, whose project was focused almost exclusively on program development, all of the grantees reckoned with tensions between their building and program components. What they learned was that ***buildings and building projects can easily frustrate or even overwhelm program commitments if staff members are not careful to define the building’s role within the program.***

Facilities are just tools, good tools, but just tools as a means to an end. This program reinforced in our minds just how important it is to keep this concept in proper perspective...A good set of tools (buildings, etc.) not used to build the lives of young people in Christ, is of very little value. (Camp F)

The building itself has pulled us in a direction we had not fully anticipated nor prepared for. Our failure was in the lack of planning for or of understanding this dynamic of change that the conference center would bring...we should have spent more time developing certain programming strategies. A building is nothing more than rental property if we are not strategic about how it is to be used. (Camp D)

From the actual building of the dining hall, we learned a few things as well. One of the most evident things was attention to detail [re: acoustics]... Another learning that emerged in the building of the dining hall was the benefits of an ideal location. If we had the chance to do it over again, we would have built the dining hall in a more central location. (Camp L)

The leadership development program became too closely tied to the activity center. Since construction took so long, the activity center director was rarely, if ever, free to play a major role in the leadership development portion of the project. (Camp C)

They also discovered that programming concerns received more attention if new facilities helped resolve safety and health concerns that were distracting staff members from their programmatic roles.

To control the physical environment of a Christian camp helps shape a spiritual reality. With the renewal of [Camp K], we brought more things under our control. Things did not simply slip away unnoticed. The changes that were made began to construct an environment that nurtured an attitude and a sense of purpose. (Camp K)

We know that by getting basic health and safety issues addressed in our facility, we are then able to focus our resources on our true ministry – people. When camp administration is dealing with the pressing issues of campers crossing a road to get to the dining hall, unsanitary bathroom conditions, inadequate lighting, plumbing, etc., then camp administration is unable to work on the more important work and on relationships with our constituencies: teachers, principals, board members, campers, parents, staff, and donors. (Camp M)

A surprising and unexpected twist on the building-programming tension developed from the increasing number of facilities rentals camps experienced when their new buildings attracted the attention and interest of other groups.

We often felt at odds with the use of camp buildings or property. Sometimes the space we hoped to use for a specific activity was in use by another group or not available for our use. Sometimes equipment we needed was not available for our use... While [Camp C] has a policy of youth camps taking priority over guest groups, this policy can be difficult to enforce. (Camp C)

We found that the staff load of a year round conference center was more than we were prepared to handle. We did not have enough time or staff to develop the program we had planned to put into place and not enough support structure from the office. (Camp D)

[We noticed strong resistance to becoming a year-round conference/retreat center because] many summer campers and long-time volunteers have kept their vision of Camp [B] within those summer months, or even in some cases, to a particular week of the summer program. (Camp B)

Camp D, in particular, discussed the variety of challenges it had to face. It noted that the “center of camp life” shifted to the new conference building, raising questions about the use and purpose (and possible remodeling) of existing large group structures. The “multiuse” nature of the new center necessitated more careful thought about the use of space, resources and volunteer time. Guest groups placed demands for exclusive use of facilities and complained when several smaller groups were in residence together. Wrestling with these issues led Camp D to assert, “We are not just a rental facility; we have carefully structured our staff so that one of us is a host

who can spend time with the group involved in the worship experience, group activities, and building of relationships as we strive to let the life of Jesus be seen in us... We consider our host role to be more of a chaplain than customer service.” In order to live out this explicit practice of presence and hospitality, Camp D developed an internship program (for which participants raise their own support) to increase its resident staff and began offering weekday volunteers “a small stipend to make it more affordable for people to take time off work and assist in this part of the ministry.” ***Establishing ministry-oriented rental procedures for camp facilities may require higher levels of staffing and certainly invites careful attention to the organization’s understanding and practice of Christian hospitality.***

Camps also noted that year-round buildings mean higher utility costs and greater investment in marketing efforts. The former outcome negatively affects camp operating budgets, requiring decreases in program funds and/or increases in camp fees. The latter situation affects staff roles and time management. Camp N discovered that the marketing director could not easily double as a summer program director because of the high time demands of both positions. Not wanting to lose the involvement of the marketing director in a “hands-on knowledge of the grassroots of the program,” Camp N changed its job description so that this staff member will “utilize his program skills throughout the year, helping retreat groups tailor programs to their individual needs.” Summer program leadership, however, must be picked up by other staff members or by volunteers.

Acquiring “bigger” and “better” attractions and support equipment also had some hidden consequences. Camp F realized that the safe implementation of new “confidence activities” meant hiring more trained summer staff members. Camp O reported that campers become “bored and listless” waiting on other group members to finish their turns on the new climbing wall. Camp O noted, “With older age groups it takes all the group leaders to help maintain safety,” which prevents these staff members from promoting attitudes of support and encouragement for the climber among the waiting group members. Camp P decided that its new sound system “is too large, too heavy and too complicated for everyday use” and its components require climate control measures that increase the camp’s heating costs. Their new HVAC system is similarly more complex than the camp requires, with higher costs because specially trained technicians must be called out to service the unit. If Camp P were they to do it over again, it would simplify the systems. Camp L’s experience, however, tempers this conclusion. This camp’s attempts to retrofit the new dining hall to solve acoustical problems led it to conclude: “It is easier to build it correctly than to realize the problems later and try to fix them.” ***Careful planning that considers realistic program support needs, levels of staffing required to safely and effectively implement the use of new resources, and the variety of desirable uses for multi-purpose buildings results in the best stewardship of camp materials and the most effective programs for campers.***

Some quite positive building and program correlations also caught camps by surprise. Camp O celebrated its ability to host the denominational conference’s “special needs camp” after accessibility upgrades put that camp on a par with the non-church-related camp previously sponsoring that event. Camp K discovered that counselors were more enthusiastic about “cabin time” in the new dorms Camp K built, as larger, multi-person rooms meant small groups could hang out together on their bunks rather than congregating elsewhere as they did when dorms consisted of two-person rooms. Camp F reported that three new teaching shelters are helping to

keep campers outdoors when camp directors need a quasi-indoor space to feel more at home. It noted, “Many youth ministers come and run a program week at camp and, in an effort to duplicate very successful programs back at their own church, they move the campers indoors, often forgetting the great benefit of the outdoor setting we have at camp...[the shelters] provide a good alternative to going inside, but yet some protection from the elements.” ***While just getting outside may not address the larger issue of exporting youth programs from congregations to camps without regard for the different possibilities of each setting, it opens up opportunities for youth ministers to notice their context and adapt their program plans.***

Quality Staff: the Best Investment a Camp Can Make

All camps agree that counselors and other staff members are pivotal figures in determining the quality of campers’ formational experiences. The need for well-trained leadership begins at the camp and program directors’ levels, and several camps used grant funds to support professional development of these leaders. Camp O’s director sought “camping and retreat ministries certification” through his denomination and a university-based distance learning program. The executive director of one denominational body, who oversaw three camps involved in ICMEP, used funds for theological education with the goal of diaconal ordination and an eventual master’s degree in specialized ministries. Camp B’s executive director completed the Indiana Center on Philanthropy’s fund raising management certificate program. Camp Q sent the entire staff to the same conference “to not only build up our staff professionally, but also to build unity within the group and evaluate the year.” Camp Q also sent a staff member to a Canadian institute to learn “how to use stress camping and ropes courses to teach spiritual truth.” Camp I hired a resident chaplain to assist weekly chaplains with program development and provide pastoral support to camp staff. Approximately one-third of the grantees requested and received continuing education reimbursement funds for attendance at ICMEP-designated workshops and conferences (e.g. the annual Search Institute conference, the first Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives conference, several Louisville Seminary Center for Family Ministries conferences, and specialized training events, such as labyrinth and centering prayer workshops). As Camp K observed, ***Providing resources and new ideas empowers leadership. Things can go on as usual, but soon things grow stagnant. To give leadership tools to work with – new resources and ideas – is empowering. The conferences, the workshops, the new library and resource center, the mixing with other camps and other directors are powerful resources.***

Camp K also noted that ***volunteer efforts go better with well-defined leadership.*** This meant “investing in full-time leadership” because “planning, organizing, and managing cannot be part-time.” For Camp A, it meant “the [early] search and call of an additional program director with a special emphasis on youth.” Camp E discovered that “the position of Trail and Rope Course Manager has been critical” to their effective training of volunteers to implement the challenge elements as part of the overall program. Camp P hired two paid summer counselors and realized that they “provide a higher level of stability and continuity for the participants and the volunteer counselors who come in just for one week.” One reason these counselors are such effective leaders is because they “are specifically trained to try to achieve the five desired outcomes as stated by the Division of Outdoor Ministries,” and they model as well as communicate aspects of this training to the volunteers with whom they work. Camp B moved

from a half-time to a full-time program director and described the outcome as “an incredible enhancement to our ministry.” Camp Q introduced the “Cabin Coach” to its staff: an experienced and spiritually mature adult assigned to each cabin to model leadership for college-age counselors “still in the process of trying to figure out what biblical discipleship is and what their own ministry strength and weakness are.” Camp I observed, “the unique role of the resident chaplain as listener and spiritual director rather than boss or judge provided a helpful voice for both counselors and directors.” Camp J discovered that its Camp Pastor program not only “helped to ‘demystify’ pastors” for campers, but also enabled its camps to “elevate the level of service by the camp staff” because of the support camp pastors provided to counselors.

Where camps struggled was in relation to the implementation of mandated volunteer staff training, especially (but not solely) for teen CITs (counselors-in-training). Camp F tried a week-long training session, but decided this was an “unrealistic expectation for teens that were already very busy in their summers” and created a “compromise” program of “weekend training, in-church training, and then shorter periods of actual experience during regular camp weeks.” Camps N, O and P successfully recruited CITs for a joint spring training program one year and then cancelled due to low registration in the second year. In contrast, Camp C reported, “Spring Training has become an indispensable tool for the equipping of our volunteers.” Camp I left in place its traditional CIT program without assessment because it determined that another, more pressing issue, namely a “holistic and systemic view of Christian formation and leadership development among youth and adults in the diocese,” needed attention first. As Camp I observed, “the number of high school and college age staff members who do not have a regular and sustaining parish church community apart from camp provides a challenge for both [Camp I] leadership and parish youth and young adult programs.” However, Camp I did institute a training program for volunteer chaplains, focusing on “the life of the camp community” and the themes of the week.

Perhaps the antidote to this volunteer malaise regarding training can be found in the growing number of camp ministries events that focus on camper leadership development. Camp E has developed a high-commitment Teen Discipleship Program that could easily become a prelude to camp counseling for teens with gifts for leadership. Camp E has learned that ***setting the commitment bar high works when a camp refuses to make exceptions or lower its expectations when challenged.***

In asking the participants to commit to the program we have been very kind but firm in how we have monitored their commitments. Giving them the dates of the retreats well in advance, if they had committed to participate they had to attend. For those who anticipated the inevitable conflicts this was not a problem. They always worked it out. For those who didn't and tried to be in two different places at the same time, the choice they had to make was clear, to be a part of the Discipleship Program or not to be. With few exceptions, those who opted out, when given the opportunity to again be a part of the program at the start of the next cycle, chose to be a part and have maintained their commitment.

Camp E reported that participants in this program are demonstrating greater leadership in their local churches and communities, including tutoring children after school, leading youth worship and youth group, leading praise and worship, developing a music program for the children of the

church, and mentoring younger children. Many of these skills would translate well into camp leadership roles. Camp E did realize, however, that its original selection process for the discipleship program needed adjustment. Noting some concern with “the young people selected to participate who were not necessarily good candidates for the program, but good campers,” Camp E is “considering an application process that would give us insight into the camper’s desire, willingness and readiness” rather than the simpler nomination process previously used.

Camp J set up “Servant Saturday” events as part of its grant project and discovered an unexpected bonus: teens who committed themselves to work projects on the weekend also exhibited gifts and abilities that camps need in their support staff. Key to the connection is the interaction between camp staff and these young people. “Since high school youth work side-by-side with Camp J staff at these events, those who demonstrate a strong work ethic...are remembered, given encouragement to apply when old enough, and are often hired.” A kind of servant leadership mentoring is occurring in these weekend events. Although it doesn’t cover all the areas of training prospective camp staff members need to be effective in their ministry with children and youth, it does introduce young people to core components of the Christian understanding of leaders as servants rather than people in the spotlight whose goal is camper adulation.

Camp Q incorporates service learning into its Youth Leadership Camp precisely because it wants to redefine the role of leader as a more service-minded individual than some youth image it to be. Camp Q explained,

On Thursday we have each cabin group leave camp and do service/ministry projects. We do this to emphasize the fact that leadership is service; it’s not about being “the boss” or making decisions...One coach realized [] that her girls all had up-front, spotlight type experiences. Instead of doing a ministry that was “glamorous” she decided to take the cabin to an orphanage under construction and do clean-up projects.

Camp Q coupled these experiences with rigorous Bible study and workshops related to specific leadership skills. It discovered that most of the campers “were hungry for more training than they had been getting in their youth groups or at a typical week at camp.” ***Campers liked being challenged to think critically about their faith.*** Perhaps another reason campers embraced the new program was because Camp Q staff tailored the leadership camp to the participants. This camp used a parent questionnaire to learn about each camper’s “leadership strength and weaknesses” and then identified in advance individual goals for each camper’s development of leadership skills. “Instead of taking the first two days of camp trying to figure out the students in the cabin, our ‘cabin team’ gets a head start in the process” and campers have a clearer sense of the goals of the week from day one. Camp Q also took this approach with prospective counselors, using the recruitment process to discern “how a summer working at camp will help develop the students’ own leadership skills, and how a summer working at camp will help them gain the skills needed for their own vocational and ministry goals. ***Advance information about and reflection on campers’ and counselors’ gifts and practices allows camps to design programs specifically geared to nurturing the lives of the young people with whom they minister, rather than generic programs into which every camper must fit him or herself.***

Camp C has taken a mainstreaming and lifetime learning approach to leadership development, in which are incorporated a set of leadership themes on a rotating basis into all of the summer camp weeks. In the five-year cycle, all campers have the opportunity to develop critical skills in identifying spiritual gifts, promoting self-worth, understanding group dynamics, cultivating good communication and listening attitudes, and engaging in conflict resolution. Camp C adopted this approach after making a discovery that transformed its thinking about leadership development. Reflected Camp C, “We started out with the idea that we could teach campers to be leaders. The fact is that some people simply are not leaders. By changing our paradigm, we discovered that with careful observation we could identify leaders among the group and encourage their gifts.” Camp C teaches all campers basic skills in the set of themes, because “in that way we are building citizenship and healthy attitudes about community.” Furthermore, the camp is modeling a lifelong learning approach to Christian discipleship, encouraging campers to continue learning while engaging in acts of ministry and service according to the gifts they have been given and have already cultivated. Campers learn that they should continue to grow and listen for future calls, but also that persons “spend [] lifetimes learning, but the opportunity to serve may be here right now.” ***Integrating leadership development into camp ministries programs and then recruiting counselors from among the “graduates” of such programs helps cultivate a pool of prospective staff members who likely have a stronger foundation in faith and gifts for ministry than staff members with little advance training.***

Even while they wait for these camper programs to generate the next generation of camp counselors, camps are finding that small steps taken to increase their prospective staff pools and retain previous counselors are having a positive effect on their ministries. Camp J saw “a modest increase in staff retention with women and a big increase in applications and retention with men” after raising salaries to a more competitive level with other summer opportunities for college students. Camp J could afford to be choosier in selecting counselors from among the applicants and could lure them back for another year. The reason to celebrate: “The faith community has been strengthened due to mature, veteran leadership.” Camp M reported that its return rate went from 35% to 57% because of salary increases, creating an opportunity for staff members to build on previous learning experiences in the second and later years. Camp Q not only tripled the size of its applicant pool when it raised salaries and conducted on-site college visits, it also was able to make hiring decisions by mid-February, allowing the camp to “do some pre-summer training with the counselors, so they come with some preparation.” ***Greater choice among applicants and retention of summer counselors improves the quality of staff members and thus the overall quality of camp ministries.***

The New Nature/Nurture Debate

One of the biggest challenges facing contemporary Christian camps is how they faithfully balance the natural resources indigenous to their work and current assumptions about what kinds of activities and resources nurture the lives of young people in the twenty-first century. Almost all of the camps used grant funds to purchase challenge course elements, waterslides, climbing walls, and specialty camp resources, etc. Most grantees also constructed air-conditioned buildings to replace cabins and activity centers cooled (at best) by fans. Some, like Camp F, saw these features as ways to draw youth to camp, where staff members could then talk about faith

issues while playing on the “Blog”. Camp M offered the assessment that middle class standards of cleanliness and safety come first for contemporary parents. From its perspective, “You can’t say ‘it’s just camp’ anymore and use that as an excuse for ‘less than acceptable’ conditions. People demand a safe and comfortable environment for themselves and for their children... Only when we get them here, can we do our work to help them grow in mind, body and spirit.” Camp H dropped its Pastor/Confirmand Retreat because of low enrollment and added “trip camps (canoeing, caving, biking) to appeal to older youth.” Camp G tried “to reach out in areas of interest and still keep the Bible teaching part of the program.” Others focused on the message such elements send to parents and other adults. Camp P suggested, “Parents feel better about sending their youth to camp and volunteers feel [better] about participating in the week, because we now have the equipment to carry out a Dramatic Arts Camp.” Camp K noted that a change in their denominational census affects what parents find acceptable. “We also know that almost 50% of the people currently attending our churches were new to the [denomination]. Born of a modern generation, they would not tolerate poor facilities and unorganized programs as much as their [denominational] forebears did.” ***Figuring out how much to imitate the creature comforts and popular activities of contemporary homes and youth cultures and how much to sustain and celebrate the gifts of nature and simple living (working and playing in the midst of God’s natural creation) is a precarious task for Christian camps. The current trend seems to be toward imitating cultural attractions to the detriment of time spent on nature-oriented explorations and shedding the trappings of everyday life and roles.***

Another nurture question related to the purposes of challenge course and specialty camp elements and their usefulness for spiritual formation as well as community-building or self-esteem exercises. Most camps described their climbing towers, zip lines, high and low ropes courses, etc. as means for building trust, self-confidence, and a sense of community. Camp F listed “team spirit”, “unity”, “trust” and “confidence” as the hoped-for outcomes when integrating challenge elements into its program. Camp N reported that its climbing wall “has become the favorite recreational activity for many of the campers. It is a unique means of developing self-esteem and group cohesiveness...” Camp P, which includes dramatic performances in most of its programs, observed that “participants are learning and practicing new skills and growing in their sense of self-esteem and self-worth. They are receiving affirmation from important adults in their lives; they are feeling good about themselves and that is good.” Camp B contended that its ropes course innovations related to developing “communication and trust” and to promoting teambuilding. Camp S, whose grant project included a new horse arena and quarters, stated that these items “promoted a sense of value amongst the riders and their families as they performed their skills for parents and guests...the facility also provided learning space for campers to understand the work and the rewards of learning proper horse care.”

Only one camp explicitly discussed theological/spiritual themes it hoped to promote with the use of challenge course elements. In fact, Camp Q captured the promotional and educational tensions presented by these elements when observing, “The initiatives on the low ropes course tend to lend themselves better to group dynamics than the high ropes course that tends to emphasize individual growth. We have learned that it is the high ropes activities that get the students’ attention, but it is the low ropes activities that teach.” Camp Q uses ropes courses to focus on cultivating social and psychological well-being skills, but takes the lessons beyond

basic good citizenship and personal care to reinforce the denomination's camp theme, "together we can accomplish more." Camp Q also sees the low ropes course as an opportunity "to introduce a study on the function of the church" and its life together as the body of Christ. Furthermore,

The fact that a student can walk across a log suspended thirty feet in the air does not mean he will make a good pastor some day. The way the student reacts will be reflective of how stress is handled in other areas of life. Also, the student will be able to begin forming new patterns of behavior that are more consistent with Christian behavior and thinking.

Camp Q helps its campers see the connections between the feelings they experience on a challenge course, the responses they make to those challenges, and the Christian beliefs and practices that should animate their lives.

Why is it so important for camps to associate explicit theological and spiritual language and reflection with climbing walls, zip lines, giant swings, low ropes courses, drama sets, and other recreational elements of camp life? The answer lies in Christian Smith's research on the spiritual lives of American youth. Smith, in his 2005 book, *Soul Searching*, describes a religious perspective among contemporary teens that he names "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" because of its emphasis on God acting as butler and divine therapist to human beings who otherwise have little need of a transcendent and immanent divine power. He identifies five basic characteristics of this viewpoint:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.²

It is the second and third characteristics, with their problematic reduction of Christian theology to simple maxims for civil behavior and personal well being, that receive reinforcement when camps fail to attach richer and fuller theological language and critical reflection to their programmatic activities. In addition, the separation of camp activities into "religious" Bible study and worship segments and recreational or group-building periods contributes to the fourth characteristic, in which God is perceived as uninterested in those aspects of a teen's life that involve hanging out with peers for fun or living into one's innate potential. ***Camps must explicitly incorporate religious language and theological reflection in all camp activities if young people are to expand their Christian perspective beyond Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.***

This becomes even more critical when camp counselors, excited about challenge course activities and the group building they promote, decide to incorporate these same activities into

² Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

congregational youth ministries (as Camp F reports is occurring when summer staff return to the youth groups they lead back home). Otherwise, both camps and congregational youth ministries hinder young people in their search for a truly powerful, life-changing God who challenges them to embrace a lifetime of discipleship and service for the coming of God's realm. Camp I's decision to invest energy in developing a "Christian formation framework" that "provides the rationale behind the disciplines of camp life from orientation and icebreakers, through regular routines of service, worship, prayer and play" works to reclaim the possibility that God's power and presence can be known and relied on in all things, not just in particularly "religious" moments or times of need. As Camp I noted, this approach does not overcome the "challenges of keeping the community whole and healthy" in competition "with challenges of keeping the community focused outwardly on mission rather than inward on itself." ***The self-centered aspect of American adolescent spirituality, represented in Smith's third characteristic, must be regularly challenged by camp and congregational leaders if it is to be reworked as a concern for faithfulness and bringing into being a new heaven and new earth.***

Camp C reminded us that ***Christian camp is fundamentally a place where American children and teenagers can experience a "Sabbath" from the demanding schedules and social expectations of their daily lives.*** Reflecting on the lives of the campers, Camp C realized, "Students these days are so busy with school, sports, jobs, chores, etc. that they rarely take time just to be. So, we give them time. We give them space in which they can listen for God. Time in which they can rest with their thoughts. Time to sit at the feet of Jesus." Fifteen or even thirty minutes of "Quiet Time" in the morning and (for younger campers) an hour of "Flat On Bunk" time in the afternoon are not sufficient to create a sense of Sabbath, especially if the rest of a camper's time is spent moving from one activity to another in a packed daily schedule. Beautiful natural settings have frequently been places where the people of God discover the spiritual benefits of silence, solitude, contemplation and rest. Contemporary children and youth are growing up without meaningful experiences of these basic building blocks of Christian faith and psychological health. Camps are uniquely well situated to restore these lost spiritual practices to young people.

Who's Now Sleeping in Our Beds?

Christian camps are no longer just venues for "church kids" to spend a week or weekend in the woods. As Camp G proclaimed, "The broader community has taken an interest in what we have been doing through this [grant] process." ***New buildings and resources have facilitated the development of new partnerships with community organizations, schools, and Christian groups in addition to each camp's constituent denomination and congregations.*** Camp G built alliances with the National Rifle Association and a community [anti-drug] initiative. Camp A developed several new retreat programs in partnership with local junior and senior high schools and an organization for area refugees. Camp B is encouraging schools to use its facilities and hosted county participants as part of a community-wide effort to promote leadership development in the area. Camp D has partnered with two area organizations, an Hispanic ministry and Youth Services Alliance, two national religious organizations, Impact Ministry and the National Missionary Convention, and surrounding local school systems. Realizing its responsibility to be good stewards of what they have and to share with its neighbors, Camp D reported that it is "becoming much more active in the greater community, working with the

Economic Development Council and other community groups to improve life in the [] area.” Camp R is working with local schools to get its [nature] curriculum integrated into fourth grade science curriculum standards.

For at least one camp, the ICMEP project has also expanded interactions with congregations from other denominations. Camp D noted, “We have been privileged to work together with local Church groups from Catholic to Baptist.” These new working relationships have nurtured greater openness to dialogue with different faith perspectives. While ecumenical dialogue was not one of the original goals, it is an outcome that Camp D readily applauds and intend to continue pursuing in the future.

There are some risks related to actively seeking community partnerships, primarily in terms of how the expectations of these other groups affect programming decisions for the camp’s primary constituency and building configurations. Some of the effects on program development have already been mentioned in the section “Which Comes First, the Building or the Program?” and so will not be repeated here. But the report from Camp N offers an example of a tension likely to develop when buildings are configured to promote adult rentals as opposed to child and adolescent campers. Camp N built its Spiritual Retreat Center with rooms designed to “sleep three adults comfortably in an in-suite style with full HVAC” because “industry trends increasingly show that adult campers want semi-private accommodations.” [Contrast this orientation with Camp K’s discovery that counselor-camper spiritual interactions vastly improved when there is a shift to large common dorm rooms rather than two-person rooms, and the competition between different program orientations and camper needs begs for careful reflection on the part of camp directors.] Add to this Camp N’s conjecture – likely accurate – that “the addition of a linen service would allow Outdoor Ministries to attract another segment of the population who are looking for a more catered environment”, and the concern about the new nature/nurture debate (discussed in the section by that name) pops into even sharper relief. ***Camps need to consider carefully how new camping constituencies (especially adults) and their expectations affect the options and abilities camps have to most faithfully uphold their mission and purposes related to the faith formation of children, youth, and young adults.*** Serving multiple age groups and a variety of campers and organizations is possible and laudable, but it will only be done well if camps repeatedly evaluate how a new facility, resource, or program affects staff time commitments, counselor-camper interactions, availability of space for key programs, and all other aspects of camp life as defined by the camp’s mission statement.

Getting the Indoor Folks Outdoors (and Vice Versa)

The relationship between camps and congregations is complicated and may include suspiciousness of and apprehension about each other’s activities and perspectives. Camp F, reflecting on its efforts to refine its mission statement, noted that it still faces the hurdle of communicating this mission in a persuasive way to its constituent congregations. “In today’s church climate, it is very difficult to get this critical information into the hands and hearts of the average person in the pew in our churches.” Camp E discovered a similar problem when it initiated its Discipleship Program, but found that persistence eventually drew congregational support.

When the program first started there was a sense of apprehension by many of those local churches that led to a sense of guarded support. Moving into the third year of the program that guarded sense of support has transitioned into much stronger support not just of the program, but more importantly of the young people involved. There are now local pastors coming and participating in the retreats. Not only are they now much more supportive of the program they are also much more supportive of the young people with many of the churches making an effort to disciple the young people in their home setting.

Camp G found that although it attracted many new partners and volunteers as the project unfolded, “the biggest weakness was getting our churches to realize that this project was going to require them to take complete ownership.” Camp H celebrated that two-thirds of the respondents in an independent survey it commissioned agreed, “the summer camp programs are an important part of our congregation’s ministry to children and youth”, but this finding also suggests that one-third of congregations do NOT see this as essential. Camp A had high expectations for a planned joint venture with congregations through confirmation retreats, but implementation brought less-than-half the anticipated number of participants. Camp A learned that church leaders “were unable to convince the parents of the confirmands that this was a worthwhile venture for their time and money.” It has reconfigured its approach, relying now “on the needs expressed by the individual churches” rather than a camp-initiated program, which places them in the position of “services for hire” rather than as full partners in the development and implementation of youth faith formation programming. ***There remain many challenges to the development of an equal partnership between camps and congregations that respects the gifts each community brings to work with children and youth.***

Camp I has used its project as an attempt to cultivate a full partnership approach. Several components of its program development work focus on bringing camp and congregational leadership together in ministry with young people.

[Camp I] anticipates parishes adopting a more pro-active relationship with [Camp I], viewing the camp experiences as part of a year-round program of Christian formation and leadership development in the parish. [Camp I] is encouraging this relationship by inviting parish priests and Christian educators to participate at [Camp I] as chaplains, inviting parish children to be with them during their week at camp, sending parishes camper lists so campers can be sent out and received back into the parish with prayer and celebrations and sending parents specific information about how they can talk with their campers about the camp themes and stories.

Camp I plans to generate two resources related to its Christian formation framework that will assist congregations in exploring their connections to the framework and could help them envision a role camp can play in the process. Camp I also has “formally integrated the parishes into camp by piloting Christian educators being present for an entire week of camp to experience the community of camp and the aspects of how scripture and sacred story and spirituality are integral to the program...” Camp I hopes to contrast the camp “*outdoor focus/indoor release perspective*” with the “*indoor focus/outdoor release pattern*” more common in church and public school settings.

Less extensive means of cultivating better camp-congregation relations also occurred as part of the various projects camps proposed. The joint marketing director for Camps O, N, and P often visits two churches a Sunday during the first half of the year to promote camp programs. His presence in congregations allows for a more personalized connection between congregational leaders and a camp staff member, which seems to strengthen ties between the two. Camp E parlayed a need for camper transportation to and from discipleship retreats into a partnership with local denominational officers, who “have gotten a vision for the ride to and from camp being just about as important as what takes place at camp...It is [] a great opportunity for officers to build relationships with the kids who are participating in the program from their area.” Camp J’s traveling day camp has earned credibility with local congregations because “young people in the neighborhood continued to come by and ‘hang out’ at the church long after the [day camp] program had concluded.” Camp J noted that this experience motivated one congregation to hire full-time youth ministry leadership and another to create an after school program midweek. The day camp program has also been invited back by almost every congregation with which it has worked.

Camp leaders also identified two significant issues related to partnering with non-congregational organizations responsible for formation within their traditions. Camp M, because of its natural ties to faith-based school systems, decided to present its “Outdoor Education” materials during site visits to schools. Three-fourths (eight of twelve) of the schools that were visited later booked a session of the program at the camp. Camp M intends to increase school visits, with the expectation that camp program bookings will also go up proportionately. Camp J realized that its denominational campus ministry sibling was a logical partner if for finding strong summer staff candidates. The campus ministry program engages in “leadership development and pastoral care among college students;” working with them permits Camp J to rely on their recommendations about prospective staff and build on a formational process already in place for young adults in the tradition. As a side note, Camp J has had less success partnering with denominational seminaries to find qualified camp pastors among those studying for ordination in the tradition. Camp J believes “[denominational] seminaries are doing a poor job of training future pastors for youth ministry,” although it is possible, given the popularity of youth ministry degree programs around the country, that what seminaries have not encouraged is interest in camp ministries as a form of youth ministry. However, Camp J hasn’t let its difficulties with seminaries prevent it from forming an alliance for the development of camp youth ministry leaders. The camp has partnered with a local congregation to offer an annual “Youth Ministry Lecture Series” to reach out to workers in congregations, reaching about 20 participants/year who might not otherwise have easy access to youth ministry education. ***Camps can form alliances with other denominational entities, but such alliances rarely develop without intentional planning and outreach by camp staff members.***

You’ve Gotta Ask Questions

Three camps identified “evaluation” as a more important aspect of program development than they had realized prior to implementing their grant projects. Camp K wrote, “One of the major successes of the ICMEP was the spring and fall workshops. These workshops helped us to develop an understanding and appreciation of the evaluation process. The analytical approach to considering evaluation was extremely helpful.” Because of their exposure to Kathleen Cahalan’s

evaluation strategies in *Projects That Matter*, Camp K chose to bring in two outside evaluators to help them assess the effectiveness of their programs and practices. These “outsider” perspectives, combined with other evaluation methods, opened eyes to what was being done well and what might need to be changed. Camp L already had an extensive evaluation process in place, but its ICMEP experience led to “revamping” some aspects of it. From Camp L,

We realized, because of your critique of our evaluation process, we were missing some key information that would help us to better develop programs that would influence the faith formation and leadership development of the young people with whom we work. We developed a new set of questions that we added to our evaluations based on the core values of our organization.

Camp A discovered that ***a well-designed evaluation process was “key” to establishing a realistic picture of how effective new programs were and what changes were needed to improve them.*** It implemented a variety of evaluation methods to test assumptions after its program director noticed “that assessments he had been making based on nonverbal cues were not always consistent with the participant responses.” Camp A also expressed appreciation for the evaluative usefulness of writing a program report, which it believes will be helpful “for sharing and retaining what has been learned and accomplished with future staff and volunteer leaders.”

The Money Problem

Raising enough money to fund existing programs and develop new ministries is a constant concern for camps. Three camps, Camp A, Camp R, and Camp B specifically reported fundraising difficulties and/or budgetary constraints that would affect the continuation of grant project initiatives. Camp A decided that limited funds means it will focus on promoting programs already in place rather than the continued implementation of new programming proposed for their grant project but not yet fully realized. Camp B stated that it would not continue to offer increased scholarship aid because it did not succeed in raising more money for the project-initiated scholarship fund. Camp B plans to try and continue some other new programs, but does not have sufficient funds to do so and are relying on “prayer,” modest fee increases and fervent hope that generous supporters will step forward soon. (Camp B also noted that it did not conduct a planned “camper motivational survey” because it moved the funds for the survey to the construction project. Had this camp developed and administered this survey, the data gathered might have assisted the camp in its fundraising efforts.) Camp R pointed to the economic downturn of 2001 and the state’s continued sluggish economy to explain its pessimism about attracting more schools to its [nature curriculum.] Camp R will continue to offer the program, but “attracting schools to a new program has been a struggle” given smaller field trip and auxiliary education budgets in public school systems.

Two camps also reported that careful research into construction costs is as essential as thoughtful attention to program possibilities, especially if camps want to avoid unplanned fundraising campaigns or many hours of rethinking budgetary allocations. Camp M “found it necessary to raise additional funds to complete our goals and in some instances to trim back on some less necessary capital projects we had hoped to complete.” Camp D wished it had insisted “on more detailed quotes” from prospective contractors and that it had spent “more time working

with the committees on the plans and with the budget” to avoid unexpected construction costs. ***While some changes in cost projections are unavoidable, these experiences offer a reminder of the importance of careful budget development, even when funds seem abundant.***

Throughout the three-to-four-year grant period, camps sometimes encountered the perception that their Lilly Endowment grant meant they no longer needed funds from their usual donor bases or denominational supporters. Camp F wished that it had foreseen this possibility and prepared better for it. However, the camp developed a response designed to educate its constituency and keep contributions flowing. “We stressed to our constituency that this gift of \$600,000 was extremely helpful and important, and it was part of a much bigger picture of long-term total needs.” ***Situating the receipt of an outside grant within the broader long range plans of the organization helps constituents understand the role they still need to play in the fulfillment of a camp’s mission and purpose.***

Camps plan to use a combination of constituency gifts, increased camper fees, and new grants to continue programs implemented during the project and develop additional new programs. Camp H noted that its three new leadership development programs are undergirded by “increased program revenue and by an increase in contributions to the operating fund” generated by renewed enthusiasm for the camp’s ministries. Camp J observed,

Nothing seems to boost morale at camp more than capital projects and property improvements. The interest raised through these high-profile projects has boosted volunteerism, aided fundraising, led to greater ministry vision by our committee members and brought new users to all three camps. Another result of these property projects is that they have laid groundwork for an upcoming synod-wide campaign for [Camp J].

Camp A pursued and received a county grant to sponsor Hispanic campers, and Camp D has started an “alumni association” that, in addition to encouraging former campers to stay in touch as young adults, is building a new donor base for the camp. Camp Q’s finance committee had the forethought to begin building into its budget from the beginning of the grant period the increased funds necessary to continue higher salaries for counselors. Noting that increased revenues from higher attendance figures have helped, Camp Q nevertheless did not wait for additional revenue, but began reordering the budgetary to support its priorities. Camp E took a similar long-range view by thinking about sustainability in designing new programs. Camp E wrote, “We could have used more of the grant’s resources to make the retreats a production with guest speakers and musicians; however, we wanted to be sensitive to the commitment to maintain the program initiative made possible by the grant after its conclusion.” ***Attending to sustainability issues through careful financial consideration of new program components and a phase-in realignment of budgetary priorities from the beginning of a project offer the best chance for successfully funding new initiatives for the long term.***

Conclusion

The Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program offered twenty-one Christian camping organizations an opportunity to dream big as they explored how new buildings and programs might better facilitate the formation of children, youth and young adults in faith. The

camps found this both a rewarding and challenging task and some of them struggled to pull all the pieces together as small organizational staffs were stretched and occasionally overwhelmed by new roles and responsibilities. While \$600,000 isn't a lot of money where building projects are concerned, it is more money than many smaller camps usually manage and have the software and personnel in place to account for (in contrast to larger institutional systems). Furthermore, the absent or diffuse systems of new program development in many camp ministry organizations created obstacles for that aspect of grant projects. Camp directors and managers, caught in the time warp of overseeing building projects while maintaining existing camp programs, had little time in the first two or even three years of the grant period to focus on new program initiatives. Some camps discovered that their new facilities were not quite as supportive of their program goals as they anticipated or that upgraded buildings began to dictate program choices rather than serving them. These significant discoveries are one of the gifts of the grant program for shaping future camp efforts to build ever more effective forms of camp ministries. Without these glitches, missteps, and delays, as well as successful endeavors, we would know less about what camps need to grow and change as leaders in ministering with children, youth and adults.

Throughout this report I have highlighted (in bold italic print) significant themes or observations that bear further attention as camps plan for increased effectiveness as places where young people encounter God and practice the Christian life together. These points are also collected here in summary:

1. Combination approaches, where professional consultants and key stakeholders come together with camp staff to achieve broader ownership and oversight of a major project will, in the long run, better serve the mission and goals of camp ministries than an outsourcing approach will accomplish.
2. A grant period of four years was frequently essential to the program development phase of the projects.
3. Direct investment of board members and key denominational leaders facilitates program development; the education and involvement of these persons deserves high priority if camp ministries are to evolve and grow.
4. Camp ministries need a combination of resilience and innovation in order to meet the challenges of their mission in the twenty-first century.
5. Integrating new staff members into existing stakeholder groups responsible for nurturing the development of new ideas would eliminate some delays in implementation related to staff turnover and expansion.
6. Camp ministry projects need to be structured so that they strike a balance between denominational accountability and freedom to experiment with ideas consistent with the camp's mission and purposes.

7. Buildings and building projects can easily frustrate or even overwhelm program commitments if staff members are not careful to define the building's role within the program.
8. Establishing ministry-oriented rental procedures for camp facilities may require higher levels of staffing and certainly invites careful attention to the organization's understanding and practice of Christian hospitality.
9. Careful planning that considers realistic program support needs, levels of staffing required to safely and effectively implement the use of new resources, and the variety of desirable uses for multi-purpose buildings results in the best stewardship of camp materials and the most effective programs for campers.
10. While just getting outside may not address the larger issue of exporting youth programs from congregations to camps without regard for the different possibilities of each setting, it opens up opportunities for youth ministers to notice their context and adapt their program plans.
11. Providing resources and new ideas empowers leadership. Things can go on as usual, but soon things grow stagnant. To give leadership tools to work with – new resources and ideas – is empowering.
12. Volunteer efforts go better with well-defined leadership.
13. Setting the commitment bar high works when a camp refuses to make exceptions or lower its expectations when challenged.
14. Campers like being challenged to think critically about their faith.
15. Advance information about and reflection on campers' and counselors' gifts and practices allows camps to design programs specifically geared to nurturing the lives of young people with whom they minister, rather than generic programs into which every camper must fit him or herself.
16. Integrating leadership development into camp ministries programs and then recruiting counselors from among the "graduates" of such programs helps cultivate a pool of prospective staff members who likely have a stronger foundation in faith and gifts for ministry than staff members with little advance training.
17. Greater choice among applicants and retention of summer counselors improves the quality of staff members and thus the overall quality of camp ministries.
18. Figuring out how much to imitate the creature comforts and popular activities of contemporary homes and youth cultures and how much to sustain and celebrate the gifts of nature and simple living (working and playing in the midst of God's natural creation) is a precarious task for Christian camps. The current trend seems to be toward imitating

cultural attractions to the detriment of time spent on nature-oriented explorations and shedding the trappings of everyday life and roles.

19. Camps must explicitly incorporate religious language and theological reflection in all camp activities if young people are to expand their Christian perspective beyond Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.
20. The self-centered aspect of American adolescent spirituality, represented in Christian Smith's third characteristic – “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself” – must be regularly challenged by camp and congregational leaders if it is to be reworked as a concern for faithfulness and bringing into being a new heaven and new earth.
21. Christian camp is fundamentally a place where American children and teenagers can experience a “Sabbath” from the demanding schedules and social expectations of their daily lives.
22. New buildings and resources have facilitated the development of new partnerships with community organizations, schools, and Christian groups in addition to each camp's constituent denomination and congregations.
23. Camps need to consider carefully how new camping constituencies (especially adults) and their expectations affect the options and abilities camps have to most faithfully uphold the mission and purposes related to the faith formation of children, youth, and young adults.
24. There remain many challenges to the development of an equal partnership between camps and congregations that respects the gifts each community brings to work with children and youth.
25. Camps can form alliances with other denominational entities, but such alliances rarely develop without intentional planning and outreach by camp staff members.
26. A well-designed evaluation process is key to establishing a realistic picture of how effective new programs are and what changes are needed to improve them.
27. While some changes in cost projections are unavoidable, these grantees' experiences offer a reminder of the importance of careful budget development, even when funds seem abundant.
28. Situating the receipt of an outside grant within the broader long-range plans of the organization helps constituents understand the role they still need to play in the fulfillment of a camp's mission and purpose.
29. Attending to sustainability issues through careful financial considerations of new program components and a phase-in realignment of budgetary priorities from the

beginning of a project offer the best chance for successfully funding new initiatives for the long term.

The conclusion of the Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program marks the end of an exciting exploration into what Christian camps can and will do when their dreams of ideal buildings and faithful new programs are well-funded. The preceding twenty-nine points do not exhaust all the possible discoveries and advice we might glean from assessing the efforts of the twenty-one grant projects represented, but they do serve as signs and signals to guide the Church's future endeavors in camping ministries. Let those who have ears to hear and eyes to see interpret these signs with theological and practical care in light of their understanding of God's mission for Christian camps.