

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



7 Reasons

Your Church Should Partner with A Christian Camp

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This summer millions of children and youth across the country will attend a Christian camp. While this subculture has its own robust ecosystem of conferences, books, and thought leaders, there seems to be a strange disconnect between local churches and Christian camping ministries. From my perspective, local churches miss out on significant benefits that come from working closely with the Christian camps in their communities (especially those connected to people affiliated with their church).

Now, I'm completely biased because I have a deep, decades-long connection with a Christian camp called [Camp Mini-Yo-We](#), located in the heart of Muskoka. I've always encouraged church staff to become more engaged with Christian camps, directed families to get plugged into Christian camps that are the right fit for them, and worked to see youth become involved with these amazing ministries as young leaders. I firmly believe that Christian camps are ministries that churches should work with closely—and here's why:

Camps reach unchurched families.

Unchurched families value what Christian camps are doing. Not only do they allow these camps to teach and host their kids, they even pay them to do it! Christian camps take different approaches to how they position themselves in the broader marketplace, but the vast majority

of these camps see unchurched families come to their programs more readily than weekend church services do.

This is an incredibly rich resource for local church leaders to learn from. Having conversations with Christian camp leaders to understand how they're engaging the community and impacting unchurched families will help church leaders to wrestle with and think about their own ministries. **This is vital: If we're going to continue to see people move closer to Jesus, we need to concern ourselves with how we're helping young people make steps toward the church.** We've all seen the statistics that the vast majority of people make the decision to follow Christ at an early age. Christian camps are a powerhouse for seeing young people take steps closer to Christ, regardless of their background. We all can learn from how these organizations relate to families in our communities.

Christian camps develop young leaders.

All Christian camps are a leadership development pipeline in motion. In fact, the only way these organizations are able to self-perpetuate is by turning young campers into cabin leaders and then staff who will push the ministry forward. When you take an up-close look at any Christian camp, you'll see this robust leadership process in action.

Christian camps are particularly effective at developing next-generation leaders through life changing adventures in God's creation.

These ministries view leadership development holistically rather than as something that happens in a classroom or by reading books or watching videos. Christian camping leaders consistently develop the next generation of leaders through lifestyle-based ministries that target whole-person development of spiritual life, physical life, emotional life, and social life.



Camps provide compelling volunteer experiences.

Your church lives and dies on the back of its ability to attract, keep, and multiply volunteers. These folks are willing to show up for zero pay and make the ministry happen. In fact, this is one of the greatest things about the local church all over the world: it's the world's most prolific volunteer machine.

Christian camps provide volunteer experiences where adults and young leaders work tremendously hard in a compelling context that keeps them coming back for more. More than just handing out programs or greeting at the door, camps are full of a variety of roles on both the facility side and within the programs. As church leaders, we could learn from this mixture of meaningful work, connection to the mission, and good old-fashioned fun as the ingredients of compelling volunteer experiences.

Camps continue to stay relevant

If you find a Christian camp within a few hours' drive of your church—one that's growing and reaching new people—it would be worth your time to ask, "What is it that God's using to grow their organization?" Because of the constant need to feed these organizations with new campers and guests, camps work hard to stay relevant and current every single year. This includes adjusting their programs to meet the needs of the market. It involves freshening up or reinventing old programs, scrapping things that no longer work, and asking their people what it is that they would like to do in the future.

From a church leadership perspective, this would be a valuable habit for us to integrate into our churches. **We need to keep our view on the horizon and dig into what it means to stay current with the communities we're serving.** Sure, camps have a financial need to stay current, but while churches may not have the same fiscal immediacy, churches will lose long-term effectiveness if they're unable to connect with new audiences on a regular basis.

Camps provide holistic ministry.

Camps provide a view of the Christian life that goes beyond sitting in rows or watching videos.

Christian camps really do portray what it means to follow Christ in a 24/7 sort of way. I've often joked that "Jesus at church" is sometimes kind of boring and stale. He has weird mismatched colored rooms in the basement and might even use flannel graphs to try to communicate. On the other hand, "Jesus at camp" knows how to drive the latest wakeboarding boat or is ready to take you on a rock-climbing adventure. That portrayal of what it means to follow Jesus is an engaging and compelling one.

Beyond the fun experiences though, this idea of living out our faith in community with each other is a powerful teaching mechanism that drives people to a deeper faith experience.

This type of community is an intrinsic and core characteristic of Christian camps, and it enables people to tap into that deeper faith life in different ways.

Camps scale relationships well.

If you visit a growing Christian camp this summer (which I strongly recommend you take the time to do), what you'll find is an intricate balance of relationships in almost-perfect harmony seeking to fulfill the mission that God has called these organizations to achieve. Camps are relational ministries.

They've figured out that friendship is shared experience, so they develop a series of shared experiences with the people who come into their sphere of influence. Camps do this in order to build a bridge for presenting the gospel and help people get a clearer sense of what it means to follow Jesus. **Look closely at how Christian camps do relationships at scale, and you'll get a clearer picture of what your church should be doing to reach more people and get them plugged in.**



Camp is fun!

Camps offer fun—it really is their product.

It's the thing they sell to people to convince them that they should leave their kids in the

camp's hands on a regular basis. Camps at their core are fun factories, but they are also capable of producing a deeper joy during their day to day activities. The word "gospel" literally means "good news," and camps have done an excellent job of portraying what that good news looks like on a daily basis. They've figured out how to manufacture an enjoyable day. Even if it's raining and the sun hasn't shone in three days, great camp leaders always figure out how to turn that around into the most amazing experience possible for their guests, all the while demonstrating the good news of Jesus through that fun!

Too many times the local church is seen as stale or disconnected from the community; fun is an amazing bridge to build incredible connections with people. It's disarming, which makes fun a strategic tool that helps people who don't normally attend our churches become willing to lean in and learn more.

What have you learned from Christian camps?

I'd love for you to leave a comment [here](#) on lessons that you've learned from Christian camps over the years. I'd also love for you to shout out to the Christian camp that you've been a part of or encouraged your people to be connected to!

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