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RHYTHMS OF FAITH

PHASE 1.4

Site Visit Thematic Summary



**WHEATON
COLLEGE**
For Christ & His Kingdom



HONEYROCK
Center for Leadership Development



**SACRED
PLAYGROUNDS**





PHASE 1.4

Site Visit Thematic Summary

NOVEMBER 2024

In summer 2024, 6 members of the Rhythms of Faith team conducted 11 visits to camps across the USA to investigate promising camp strategies for influencing family faith formation. Each visitor drafted summary reflections in narrative form that were subsequently validated by representatives from each site. A team of 5 analysts (including 3 of the site visitors) coded the raw data from the visits, including field notes (11) and focus group transcripts (54). The team of analysts and visitors considered the coded data alongside the summaries, resulting in four qualitative themes, along with several sub-themes. These are summarized below.

Theme 1

Christian summer camps are broadly effective at impacting the personal faith and practices of participants, although they frequently lack a holistic approach to faith formation aimed at influencing faith beyond the camp experience.

- a. Camp impacts begin with quality programs and a focus on the developmental needs of campers.
- b. The most successful cases for impacting faith included program progression and leadership development opportunities that allowed successive camp experiences to build on one another.
- c. The focus of faith formation programming tends to be oriented around the camp experience and focused on developing campers' personal faith in that context.
- d. The ability of camp to influence family faith formation may require a paradigm shift: strategies are inconsistent, and many leaders do not view family faith formation as a central goal of camp.

Theme 2

While some church leaders, parents, camp professionals, summer staff and camp leaders who are highly engaged in camp through long term involvement and participation envision camp as part of a faith formation ecosystem, many, particularly those that are less deeply engaged in camp, often lack that vision and view it as a standalone, disconnected experience.

- a. Camp operates alongside of and in relationship with a network of faith-influencing spaces including the home, the local church, youth groups, and other spaces.
- b. Camp has an important role in faith formation, providing an environment set apart from permanent spaces, opportunities for faith exploration/ownership, and outdoor engagement.
- c. Camps operate most effectively as a supplement to or catalyst for more permanent faith-forming spaces, rather than a replacement or sole source of faith formation.

Theme 3

Camps have the opportunity to expand their influence in faith formation by serving as training centers for equipping campers, parents, and church leaders.

- a. Parents and engaged church leaders are willing and sometimes eager to receive resources and training from camps to aid in camper and family faith formation.
- b. There is oftentimes a lack of understanding of camp's full potential in terms of its role in family faith formation among camp leaders, church leaders, and parents.
- c. Many campers are unchurched and/or come from homes that do not support Christian formation. Camps can influence and strengthen these faith foundations.

Theme 4

Robust models that incorporate camp into family faith formation include strategies focused on campers, parents, and church leaders at each phase of the experience: before, during, and after camp.

- Effective strategies are context-dependent, especially considering Christian tradition, extent of family faith, church leader engagement, camp location, and programming approach.
- The most consistently effective strategies are focused on fostering conversations: with fellow campers, staff members, parents, and church leaders about important topics, especially relating to God/faitth.
- Effective models are built on a clear philosophy of camp ministry that permeates all aspects of camp.
- For camps to be successful in family faith formation, frontline staff must uphold the camp's philosophy and be trained in the effective strategies for each group and at each phase of the camp experience.

