



LIFELONG LEARNING

Virginia Theological Seminary

Episcopal Camp Formation Project

Virginia Theological Seminary's Episcopal Camp Formation Project sought to learn more about faith formation at Episcopal camps in order to:

- Support and inspire formation programming and culture
- Educate dioceses and congregations about the ways camps engage in formation
- Develop seminary programming/language/courses that support camps and equip current and future church leaders
- Develop and provide financial, programmatic, or other resources to camps for faith formation

Project Design

Two surveys were administered from mid-January through mid-February 2019, one to camp professionals and the other to those engaged in local church or diocesan ministry. The surveys were promoted using social media platforms and email from Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, FORMA, and VTS's Lifelong Learning as well as the researcher's personal social media account. Both surveys emphasized open-ended responses or included write-in options.

Camp Professionals Survey. Twenty-one camp professional surveys were completed, with 18 unique camp and conference centers represented which is 21% of the ECCC membership (18 of 85 centers). Respondents included 11 Program Directors, seven Executive Directors, six Clergy/Chaplains, and three summer staff/counselors.

Congregational Leadership Survey. Seventy-eight surveys were completed. Asked which camp/conference center they affiliate most frequently, 21 camps were named. Respondents self-identified as the following (multiple checks were allowed): camp counselor/staff alumni (53%); parents (40%); Christian educator/youth ministers (29%); volunteers for faith formation in the local church (18%); clergy (14%); camp professionals (includes one session dean) (9%); diocesan youth ministry/program leadership (4%); local church leadership (parish admin, verger, "church staff member") (4%); and other (clergy spouse and diocesan youth) (3%).

Observations and Recommendations.

The following stand out as the most significant observations from the research:

1. Camp makes a significant positive difference in the formation of faith of children, youth, and young adults. Camp/conference centers are proud of the work they are doing and interested in continuing and/or improving the faith formation impact of their programs.
2. While camp/conference centers reported worship as the most notable faith formation component, Christian educators highlighted the experience of Christian community, faith formation programs, and a richer, deeper, more personalized faith as the biggest benefits of faith formation at camp (Christian education and discipleship).¹
3. Support and connection between camp/conference centers and local congregations was described in terms of recruitment, fundraising, volunteering, and attendance. Notably, there was little to no partnership regarding faith formation described by survey respondents.

The following are recommendations or opportunities worth exploration from the research:

Regarding partnerships with/between families, congregations, and dioceses:

- Strengthen partnership between camp/conference centers and congregations for continuous lifelong faith formation.
 - Plan camp faith formation programs with congregational or diocesan leaders at the table. Use diocesan initiatives or congregational programs as springboard for planning or partnering.
 - Utilize social media, pre-camp mailings, letters home at camp's end, blogs, regular e-newsletters, and congregational or diocesan communication to inform and invite families and congregations into faith formation programming at camp. What is happening? What can you expect? How can you engage? What could you ask campers upon return home?

Regarding faith formation at camp:

- Articulate faith formation as a distinctive that sets Episcopal camps and conference centers apart from other programs. Integrate faith formation throughout camp programming; establish goals and objectives around faith formation to ensure faith is a filter through which all camp activities and programs are considered.
- Prioritize, research, and provide funding resources for staff and faith formation program development on the national church, diocesan, and camp levels.
- Assess summer staff/counselor hiring & training specifically for the work of Christian education and discipleship. Include openness and/or enthusiasm for discipleship and formation leadership in application and interview process. Prepare summer staff, those with most camper contact and influence, for all four components of faith formation.

¹ Faith formation was broadly defined for the project as encompassing four components: awe, wonder, mystery; Christian education; discipleship; and worship.

- Train & prepare clergy for the unique ministry and opportunities in camp chaplaincy; move beyond the worship experience, emphasizing the discipleship of summer staff/counselors so summer staff/counselors are better equipped for discipleship themselves.
- Explore social justice opportunities at camp – in hiring and programming in and out of intentional faith formation spaces.

Regarding programs or other support VTS can provide:

- In partnership with Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, host annual or bi-annual faith formation summits for executive/program directors, chaplains, and/or summer staff either in person at VTS or using web conferencing.
- Develop modules, curricula, or “how to” trainings for chaplains and summer staff in each of four areas of faith formation at camp.
- Explore funding a partnership between ECCC and Sacred Playgrounds to further explore faith formation effectiveness and potential at Episcopal camps and conference centers.

A webinar/meeting to discuss project results will be held Friday, June 14 from 5 – 6:30pm Eastern Time. All are welcome! To RSVP and for call in details when they’re available, email Beth Bojarski, Project Consultant (bettybojarski@gmail.com).

The full survey analysis report is available upon request. Email Beth Bojarski (bettybojarski@gmail.com) before June 14 and VTS Lifelong Learning (lifelonglearning@vts.edu) after June 14 to request a copy.