

# Camp Bethel's Small Group Camping Philosophy:

We believe in a relational and experience-based approach to Christian Education in the out-of-doors, supported by curriculum and scripture. We believe direct interaction with others and with God's creative Earth helps us to fully understand God's love.

## In this document:

- I. **Small Group Camping: The 8-Key Elements**
  - II. **In the world, but not of the world: the Camp Bethel experience**
  - III. **Theology of Small Group Camping: "F.N.S.P.R."**
  - IV. **When you say "camp," what do you think of?**
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## I. Small-Group Camping: The 8-Key Elements

**Relational Ministry: Important Aspects of the Small-Group Summer Camping Program at Camp Bethel: A culmination of 81 years of Camp Bethel ministries and over 53 years of small-group camping philosophy.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.** Every aspect of the small-group summer camping program follows a common function. The small-group philosophy centers on what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ, (from 1 Corinthians 12). Our function, (also stated as our Mission), is for each camper to gain a better understanding of their part in Christ's Body, their relationship with the Creator, with others, and with creation. Form follows function. Aspects of our form are as follows:

### 1. Small Group Emphasis:

10-12 campers and 2-4 counselors combine to make a unit (small group); low camper to counselor ratio; campers develop significant relationships with mature adult Christian counselors and with one another; group does "everything" together all week; there is NO individual free, unsupervised time; high supervision and safety with low accident rate; family/community building. Camp Bethel has 8-13 units per camp week.

Counselor Application: *You're here because we expected you to be a mature Christian role model *Counselors will supervise campers <b>at all times</b> *Lead cooperative team-building games, rather than competitive games *Use language and plan activities that intentionally facilitate group building
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### 2. Sanctity of the Small Group:

Each unit (group) plans their own week on the Program Board; units are not disturbed in their "body-building" process; units interact with other units only at appropriate times, (ex: whole camp eats most meals together; large group games and special all camp evening activities; Units will not do the challenge course with another unit, and they will not camp out/sleep out/Home-in-the-Woods together); every camper's location is known at all times because of the Program Board.

Counselor Application: *Facilitate program scheduling that includes the needs and desires of all campers *Communicate your group's location to the program director via the program board
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### 3. Experiential Christian Education:

More time is spent living and doing things together as Christians than is spent listening to lecture; Christian truths are learned by activity supported by Bible study, worship, and camp curriculum; relationships and activities with counselors and volunteers are the foundations of the campers' learning; age-appropriate Christian education goals; creative metaphor with Biblical back-up; daily Bible use; most activities have applicable scriptural/Christian metaphor and meaning; nightly worship in both large and small groups; we constantly seek the "teachable moment".

Counselor Application: *Relate each activity to a life or Biblical lesson *Attend nightly worships unless otherwise arranged with program director *Lead night-time devotions each evening before bed *When leading group games or filling transitional time, choose games/activities that enhance each camper's overall experience, (ie: non-competitive; creative free play; emulate love and care for each other.
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**4. Emphasis on Stewardship of God's Creative Earth:** Nature study and Bible study are BOTH forms of God's revelation of love; low-impact site camping; active participation and interaction with God's creation; the supporting facility should exemplify good stewardship with efforts to recycle, compost and purchase "Earth friendly" supplies and foods; activities are more inclined to involve interaction with the camp setting, (ex: hiking as opposed to kickball; "Home-in-the-Woods" as opposed to playground); we do things at camp you CAN'T do in other settings; we have 470 acres of forests, fields, ponds, creeks, trails, and hills... we use them!

Counselor Application: \*Facilitate unstructured play time interacting with God's creative Earth  
\*As often as possible, your activities should be out-of-doors, immersed in nature  
\*Follow low impact camping methods, and exemplify eco-friendly practices

**5. The Small Group's Dynamics and Make-up: *The process of Relationship:***

The foundation of the summer camp is the group. Throughout the summer, in addition to the attention we give to the individual camper, our focus is continually on the "family unit" living as the Body of Christ. The framework developed by Dr. Bruce Tuckman is particularly applicable to the small-group setting. Tuckman describes five stages in the progression of small group development: forming, norming, storming, performing, and reforming/adjourning:

**Forming:** individuals become a group (1<sup>st</sup> night and 1<sup>st</sup> few days).

**Norming:** group interactions take on patterns, styles, codes and "norms."

**Storming:** any group difficulties eventually come out into the open; needed for true relationship.

**Performing:** problems are confronted; group realizes their potential; functions as the Body of Christ.

**Reforming/Adjourning:** preparations and discussions before returning to the "real" world.

Inclusion as upheld by our acceptance of all applicants, including scholarship & Special Needs campers.

Counselor Application: \*Be attentive to small group dynamics  
\*No camper is ever to be left out. Check in individually with every camper every day  
\*Know what stage your group is in at all times and use this knowledge  
\*Work through other stages towards the Performing stage  
\*Must experience some level of Storming to experience true Performing  
\*Storming is not necessarily conflict; it's about exposing the true self

**6. Progression of Programs:**

Each age level offers a new and more challenging/exciting program; this makes for long-term constituency; age-group efficacy and target marketing; trip-camping and "out" camping support this progression. Promotional language reflects this progression.

Counselor Application: \*Talk with campers about what program they want to participate in next summer  
\*Show young campers locations of Home-in-the-Woods; high ropes; Adv Village

**7. Family Style Meals and Cook-Out Program:**

Meals are not just a "get-them-in, feed them, get-them-out" time; meals are a major part of the Experiential Christian Education each camper receives; family style manners/values/expectations; table fellowship similar to Christ's; Cook-out teaches self-sufficiency & basic cooking skills; Cook-out provides greater small group sanctity.

Counselor Application: \*Model and instruct your campers on family style meal manners/values/expectations  
\*Assign runner, assure everyone gets a portion from first serving, pass serving bowls  
\*Make campers aware of other food options such as PB&J, Salad Bar and fruit.  
\*Encourage, but do not force campers to try new foods  
\*Instruct, lead, and involve campers in cook-outs, including fire building and food prep

**8. Camping (to camp) implies a VERB and implies ACTION:**

We believe there should be EFFORT required at camp to provide for one's daily needs, (food, shelter, clean bathrooms, set tables, etc.). When entering into this type of setting, a deeper sense of our own creativity emerges. We experience the closeness of living with and caring for ourselves and others, analogous to the community of early Christians described in Acts 2 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12.

Counselor Application: \*Lead your unit in completing daily duties as assigned on the duty board  
\*Maintain a clean cabin/AV/camp including bathrooms  
\*Keep campers active to ensure fewer incidences of injury & homesickness  
\*Establish an atmosphere of mutual care and respect for each other and camp

## II. In the world, but not of the world: *the Camp Bethel Experience*

The Experience:	What the world offers:	What Camp Bethel offers:
Songs and music as poetry, praise and openness	My I-pod, my earphones, my cocoon, only open to the glow of my digital screen	Group singing, guitars ringing, making a joyful noise to God, the glow of a campfire
Understanding the natural world	The Discovery Channel, Biology S.O.L.s	Wading in the creek, sleeping under the stars, waking with the Sun, getting in tune with the Cadence of Creation
Stories that define our culture & our faith	Movies, DVDs, reality TV, gossip	Bible characters, personal "when I was a kid" tales, common experiences, the teachable moment
Conflict resolution	Sanctions, lawsuits, violence, war	Fight & flight are not options; no one is an island, solving conflict is an intentional part of the week's experience.
Human relationships	Pop songs, tabloids, divorce, MySpace, staring a screen	<i>"When one part suffers, all parts suffer with it. When one part rejoices, all parts rejoice with it... Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you a part of it."</i> -1 Corinthians 12

## III. Theology of Small Group Camping: "F.N.S.P.R."

In our summer camping programs, we follow an over-arching philosophy of "Small-Group-Camping." This style of camp is scripturally based (1 Corinthians 12:12-24) and is supported by current understandings of human/behavioral psychology. The resulting experience matches Biblical-Spiritual patterns and reveals universal and eternal truths. Follow along during a week of camp, living and learning as the Body of Christ:

		Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	NEW LIFE
1	<b>Tuckman's Group Dynamics</b>	Forming & Norming	Norming	Norming & Storming	Storming & Performing	Performing	Performing & Reforming	Transforming
2	<b>Psycho-Social</b>	pre-affiliated	intimacy	intimacy & control	power & control	differentiation	termination	
3	<b>Informal setting</b>	polite	becoming a group	comfort -or- fight or flight	fight or flight	being a group	saying goodbye	
4	<b>Public School</b>	reforming in fall	working it out	testing limits	learning the limits	working well	ending the year	
5	<b>Brueggeman's Old Testament</b>	Orientation is new but unfocused	Orientation is clear and understood	Disorientation is a surprise	Disorientation is obvious & seems permanent, unless...	Reorientation as a surprise gift	Reorientation creates joy & hope for... <i>one to come?</i>	
6	<b>Psalms</b>	order, wisdom, sovereign God, 104, 127, 128	righteous are blessed, wicked are punished, 131, 133, 145	lament, disillusion, displacement, 42, 88	Confusion, despair, impossible barriers, hopelessness, 44	hope, rescue, imagination, 13, 30, possibility, grace,	unexpected grace as a gift, praise, thanksgiving, 40, 138	How long to wait?
7	<b>The Gospel</b>	Incarnation	Calling the 12	The new Truth is difficult	Betrayed, denied, killed	He lives! It WAS true!	Spirit comes; Church!	On Earth as in Heaven
8	<b>Biblical journey of Christian eschatology</b>	Father, creator	Law, covenant, prophesy	Son, I am	New laws, new covenant	Prophecy fulfilled, I and I, alpha-omega	Holy Spirit, new world order	Thy Kingdom come: Now, not yet...
9	<b>Relational Ministry at Camp Bethel</b>	Meeting & learning about each other	Common experiences	Routine of living in close community presents challenges & in turn, fear	Fear devolves into selfishness which exposes the true self = openness	Openness invites grace, grace provides rescue & hope	Hope & renewal (reorientation): a new way	Provisions for living out our hope
10	<b>Small-Group Camping at Camp Bethel</b>	10-12 individuals become a group; 1 <sup>st</sup> night and 1 <sup>st</sup> few days	group interactions take on patterns, styles, codes and "norms"	order is tested as the novelty wears off	any group difficulties eventually come out into the open; needed for true relationship	problems are confronted; group realizes their potential and functions as the Body of Christ	preparations and discussions before returning to the "real" world	experience is put to the test back in the "real world"

## IV. When you say “camp,” what do you think of?

(From a report to a camp future planning committee from Rev. Gary Heaton)

For me the “camp” in camping ministry is an intentional, experiential encounter with creation. Intentionally providing an opportunity for participants to erect shelter, prepare food, or just keep warm, is an essential part of what it means to “camp.” Camping also implies action and effort: it is not a spectator sport. Participants must interact with the ground or environment, experiencing both struggle and harmony with the elements. When the church sets out to do these things as a Christian education tool, camping ministry begins.

As part of the long range planning for [this camp], I wish to share with you my perspective on camping ministry. Camping means different things to different people: retreats; day-use recreation; picnics; etc. I wish here to discuss the use of [your camp] as a site for church program camping, such as the summer youth camp: the case in which the district provides a program as well as a site to further the church’s ministry.

You may choose any degree of intensity for program camping. Perhaps the most intensive manifestation of camping is trip camping, such as backpacking or canoeing. These trip camps require total immersion into the wilderness, total self-reliance, and a great deal of competency to practice safely. A lower degree of intensity is found in temporary site camping. This level is best exemplified in our [overnight camp outs]. This type of activity, when supplemented with adventure activities, can provide much of the same benefits as trip camping. Another degree lower in intensity is the cabin camping. This camping provides many of the sights and sounds of the camping experience, with fewer risks, more comfort, and ready access to electricity and water. Another level is the dormitory camping where housing is fairly conventional, but daily activities are outside.

These are the settings. Over the years, different summer camp directors have used a variety of these settings. Our choice of setting directly relates to our goals of church camping and our beliefs about how church camping is effective. Our goal is to provide a fun, safe, outdoor experience, which will foster and nurture Christian faith growth in young people. Some of our beliefs or philosophies about how church camping can accomplish that goal are as follows.

**1. CREATION ITSELF:** The main curriculum for camping ministry is the out-of-doors, the environment. God has used the wonders of nature as a tool for self-expression for longer than any book of religion or prophet. God speaks and teaches using methods that strike basic chords deep in our souls. Camping ministry provides that forum by insuring the availability of ground, real estate, “a place apart” where people can draw close to creation (Psalm 19). It is not done in the local church building, or on a blacktop, or where streetlights obscure the view of the stars. A healthy Christian faith requires one to look outside one’s self and consider and care for others. One facet of this “looking beyond one’s self” is an emphasis on caring for our environment and natural resources, and viewing ourselves as good stewards of the world God created for us. This is why we want to go to the trouble of recycling, for example.

**2. HUMAN EFFORT:** Camping is a verb; it implies action. An essential element of what it means to camp is the implied effort required to provide for one’s basic needs. When entering into a natural setting, effort is put into filling basic needs (food, shelter, bathrooms, etc.) and a deeper sense of our own creativeness emerges. We are filled with wonder and amazement, not only at God’s handiwork in nature, but at God’s work in creating ourselves. We are indeed “wonderfully made” (Psalm 139). People, children learn best by experiencing: by doing, action, and involvement. We put campers in small groups to experience the closeness of living and caring for other people, analogous to the community of early Christians described in 1st Corinthians 12:12.

**3. THE WILDERNESS: AN UNFAMILIAR SETTING:** Going camping puts us in a place outside our routine. We find ourselves a bit more vulnerable to unexpected or unfamiliar happenings. Being in the wilderness opens us up to new learning and new relationships. Engaging in activities such as camping, hiking, challenge course and other adventure activities helps us to shed many of the masks which we need to function in our normal daily routines. This vulnerability creates uniquely fertile ground for growth and openness to life-changing revelations and relationships. Intentionally creating this teachable moment and passing on the faith through a loving, personal relationship is the magic of Christian camping.

These are a few of the more important points I consider when I think about why our district bothers to offer a camping ministry for young people. Our decisions in [this study of our camp] impact directly on whether we continue to develop and offer this ministry in the [Virlina] District. Do we value this ministry? Does the District own acreage [in the mountains] for the purpose of providing a ministry of this type, or is the summer camp program just another paying client to the facility?