



Diocese of Western Michigan

AREA Sq. Miles: 18,701
TOTAL POPULATION: 2,739,194
ACTIVE MEMBERS (2006): 13,203
CONGREGATIONS: 58 year-round
4 seasonal chapels
1 Parochial Mission
DEANERIES: 5
AVG. SUNDAY ATT. (2006): 5045
REGIONAL MINISTRIES: 0
PRIESTS: 38 F/T; 15 P/T;
77 Non-parochial, Licensed
or retired
DEACONS: 24 total/7 retired
DIOCESAN 2007 BUDGET: \$893,923

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Experience and Reflection

In 2004 the Diocese suspended its summer camp program for one year to provide an opportunity to change the culture from an unhealthy environment to a healthy, Christian Formation opportunity. In 2005 Senior Camp was launched with a new design and a commitment to form young people in meaningful roles in the life of the Church. Translating the camp experience of the youth into meaningful parish experiences has been a challenge in many cases. This Baptismal Ministry Reflection is intended to consider the role of the Senior Camp in the life of our diocese and our congregations for forming young people to have meaningful experiences in their life in the Church. In addition, as the youth become more experienced, the need to invite youth more fully into the life of a congregation needs to be a priority.

The following is a description of the Summer Senior Camp experience.

Senior Camp is a combination traditional summer camp and a "leaders in training" program. Inviting and encouraging each camper to explore where God is calling them.

We believe that each camper has different gifts that are given freely by God. We believe that the staff are there to challenge the campers to find new gifts and encourage them to grow into the best adults they can be in a safe and caring environment.

We invite and encourage the campers (and each other) to

- 1) Try new skills
- 2) Practice new models of leadership
- 3) Discern their gifts within the community
- 4) Go deeper with their own relationship with God
- 5) Seek communities outside of camp that continue to support them in their own individual gifts

We do this with every aspect of camp life; cabin life, worship, activities, leadership roles, formation time, outreach and even down-time.

Cabin life

Each cabin has 2 adult counselors. The cabin counselors act as mentors, guides and models of behavior. They eat together in a family-style table and have to work through problems that come when 12 people share a one room.

Every day ends with "Good Night Groups", a time of bible study and reflection of the day. The cabin counselors lead the discussion and invite each person to join in the conversation.

Worship

Our worship time is meant to bring us together and remind us that God is continually in our midst. We say a grace before every meal and thanksgiving after. We have a daily Eucharist and daily Compline (the last prayer of the day). As the youth participate in worship planning, it helps them understand liturgy as a work of the people by writing prayers, litanies, or filling liturgical roles during worship.

Activities

We participate in all the activities of a traditional camp – swimming, canoeing, games, arts & crafts and archery. One day we go on an office-site trip (in the past we've gone canoeing to a secluded island and tubing down the Newaygo River). We also participate in group building and group challenge activities.

Formation time

We spend one to two hours a day with intentional Christian formation (for those not familiar with the term, it is basically "Sunday School" – an intentional time of learning and being formed). The camp staff lead a variety of discussion and activities based on the theme of the camp year. Meditative walks, learning about Anglican prayer beads, gifts discernment, meditating on scripture, learning different forms of prayer, the sacraments and discussing how God is a part of your life have all been topics.

Our theory is that we invite the young people (and each other) to take a closer look at their own personal relationship with God. We also invite them to look at The Episcopal Church and her traditions. Inviting – we invite the young people to go at their own pace with their Christianity.

Downtime

People often don't think of downtime, or free-time, as times we can encourage the growth of young people, but we do. This is a time when they are able to relax and have fun – they meet new people and learn about differences.

Leadership Roles

The biggest difference between junior and senior camp is the inclusion of leadership roles at senior camp. The adults are asked to use their own gifts and strengths to coordinate one aspect of camp, and to invite the young people to try new things and see how their gifts are suited for those tasks.

Leader of the Day: This role is the time & schedule keeper. They make decisions when changes need to be made to the schedule, they call people together and make sure everyone is there, and get their attention when it's needed. They also coordinate with the other groups to make sure things run smoothly and everyone knows what's going on. The goal of this group is to

- 1) know the schedule
- 2) make sure others know what's going on
- 3) see where there are gaps that need to be filled
- 4) make changes as necessary
- 5) think for the group as a whole
- 6) bring people together and get everyone's attention

Scribe: The scribe keeps the daily journal – what's going on, funny & fun things that have happened, etc. The goal of this group is to

- 1) observe others
- 2) note the things that people will want to remember
- 3) write down those things

Photographer: They have the official camp picture. At the end of the week each person gets a disk with all the pictures they've taken.

- 1) observe others
- 2) keep a physical record of what we did during the day

3) make sure we have pictures of everyone at camp

Worship: These people coordinate the worship. They work with the priest of the day and with the camp's Spiritual Director to plan the Eucharist. They also lead Compline and the blessing and thanksgiving at meals. The goal of this group is to

- 1) know the structure of Eucharist
- 2) be able to lead Compline
- 3) read and pray aloud
- 4) invite others to participate in worship

KP: These people are in charge of the meal times. The goal of this group is

- 1) set up for meals
- 2) make sure that people are in lunch room and the blessing is said when it's time
- 3) make sure any announcements that need to be said are done
- 4) entertainment during the meal (songs, mail call, etc.)
- 5) make sure the thanksgiving is said and people are dismissed
- 6) make sure the tables are clean and everything is put away.

Environmentalist: This is the group that ensures our health and safety, and also the health of the environment. The goal of this group is to

- 1) make sure people are staying safe and healthy (drinking water, wearing appropriate shoes, eating well)
- 2) keep the site clean (people are picking up after themselves, etc.)
- 3) To notice the group's impact on the environment, and try to find ways to lessen that impact (garbage use, etc.)

Implications – "So What?"

Implications for Personal Transformation – As the youth in our church experience affirmation in a camp setting, the re-affirmation of their gifts for ministry in the life of a congregation can change an individual's sense of self worth and commitment to a life in God. Embracing and encouraging youth, being willing to risk with them, can also transform the adults who are both mentors and students with young people.

Implications for Congregation/Community Formation – The clergy in our congregations have the capacity to either encourage or block the capacity of young people as leaders. Laity have the capacity to embrace or discourage leadership among young people. Clergy and laity may have to be transformed into the recognition that young people are full participants into the life of their church through their baptism. The ministry in a parish among and with young people is a reflection of the congregation's ministry of hospitality and its ability to recognize the gifts of all of the baptized.

Implications for Church Systems – One way we want to address the 'disconnect' that is experienced by our youth between Camp and home parish is through one-on-one relationship meetings and a community organizing methodology. Those who provide leadership to the Camp program want to invite clergy and lay leaders in congregations where youth are struggling to have meaningful roles, to a one-on-one conversation discovering their personal story about being a young person in the church. We need to know what people's self interest is – and find out where

our need and their story connects. We are aware the connection may not be where we hope it to be. If the adults in the church have a desire to keep the young people silent, then we may need to shake the dust off of our feet and move on. However, if the leaders of a congregation have meaningful experiences of their own as young people, or wish they had, then we have a common ground on which to begin a discussion of how to bring young people more fully into leadership roles in that congregation.

In order to begin this process, we need to teach people how to make a connection and organize ourselves to engage this ministry in a new way. We need to take what we see as biblical values, and what the church is about (telling stories and finding out where stories meet) and sharing the story to come out with a new story. We also need to engage the youth more concretely and ask: What about this experience was so great that you want to (re)create it back home?

Questions for Partners

How can things be created differently so that campers can take their experiences into their congregations?

How do you take mountain top experiences back home?

Is this a reasonable process to pursue? Where are the pitfalls?

What are we overlooking in our goal to get young people more engaged in the church?

How do we work with the decision-making people in the congregation to make the formation experiences of the youth valued and replicated in the congregation?

How do we take this model of formation into our congregations?

Basic Schedule for Senior Camp

Sunday: Meet & greet. Introduce campers to camp life & to each other. Set the rules of the cabin & make everyone aware of the rules of camp. Begin to build a strong cabin unit with games & activities, ending the day with a camp fire & coming together as a full camp.

Monday: Introduction to camp life. The first full day of camp introduces everyone to life as a community. Full camp activities with small cabin debriefs is the focus of the day.

Tuesday: Becoming a full community. The transformation from small cabin life to full camp community. Full camp group building activities is the focus.

Wednesday: Enjoying our life together. This is the day we go off-site for a fun activity (canoeing, tubing, etc.). Wednesday is packed, but not as rush-rush.

Thursday: Wednesday night and Thursday are the “storm” part of a group. Being a community means that a times we don’t always get along. This is the day that happens.

Friday: Bringing it home. We’ve made it through the week – we get to celebrate our time together, but also look at where we go from here. How do we bring our learnings home.

Saturday: Saying goodbye. What does it mean for a community to say goodbye? How do we do this with God in the center of our community?