

Report from the Conversation about the Future of Camping in Mission West Released 10/9/2013

On Saturday, October 5, 2013 leaders from the Hi-Plains, Tres Rios and Central Areas youth and outdoor ministry committees met for relationship building and a discussion of how God is calling us to engage in outdoor ministry for the years to come. We spent time sharing stories of how we came to love camping ministries, what we thought the purpose was in outdoor ministry and made sure our concerns would be addressed in this time together. We also discussed what we can improve upon and what we do well. There were also different types of camp models shared to take back to our areas to discuss what most interests our areas and what we can do better together.

Those gathered had diverse camping experiences, ranging from growing up in CC (DoC) camps as well as other denominational church camps, Girl Scouts camps, YMCA camps, Boy Scout camps, managing campgrounds, and growing up to becoming involved in church camps as an adult as sponsors or as parents.

We identified the following purposes of church camp: supporting and building upon our local congregational youth ministries; creating a space where our young people can be accepted and loved unconditionally through love of Christ and others; providing a space where our students can experience God in Christ; providing opportunities to experience God's creation in an active and outdoor setting; and providing quality education and spiritual formation opportunities.

The concerns raised were primarily focused on the cost of camping ministry and the need to increase the quality and content of camping experiences. In particular, we saw the need to improve our camp curriculum, so that our youth receive even stronger biblical and spiritual formation through their camping experiences. This key aspect is something we acknowledge as a group we can do better together than separately. Concern was also raised that too much planning responsibilities, particularly with CYF, has been placed on Area Officers, Youth Ministry Team members and Area Council members, causing them to be overworked and not able to get the full experience of camp. A balance must be found between leadership and spiritual growth for our high school leaders. It was suggested that adult leaders take more charge in camp planning to ensure quality content consistent with youth ministry goals. A priority must be placed on what God is accomplishing rather than what we are accomplishing. Accountability as a leader in local congregations is an important aspect of being a part of a council or team, and some felt like this aspect is not always enforced. Finally, concern was expressed over the current lack of strong involvement of Senior Ministers in area camping programs.

There were many things expressed that we did well. While we felt that improvement in the area of student leadership was needed, our strong emphasis on student leadership is a huge positive. It was acknowledged that many current pastors first heard their calling while engaging in camping ministries and that student leadership also provides a lifelong commitment and connection to congregations and our denomination. Relationship building among the students and pastors was also noted as strength in our camping programs. The joint Chi Rho camp this summer also provided a prime example of what we can do better together. Some of the positives of this joint camp include: setting standards of adult meetings daily, using the Inside Out camp curriculum published by Chalice Press, having more than enough staff on hand to avoid burn out, plugging in our volunteers where their gifts lie, instituting a silent half hour where students and adults could reflect, and rotating keynoters from each area where everyone could "see" someone they knew and heard different stories of faith. All involved with the Mission West Chi Rho Camp saw strength and creativity in the need to work together to find new ways of doing things instead of assuming and adopting the attitude of "we have always done it this way." The strong commitment of our congregations to our camping and outdoor ministries was emphasized by stories told of local congregations who scholarship anywhere from 50% to 100% of camping fees. Another congregation shared how their senior minister

attends one or more camp each summer and brings back the stories and importance of those camp experiences to their congregation so they can see their pastor and congregation is committed to spiritual growth through camping ministry.

Some of the possible camps discussed that we could offer in the future include Mission/Service camps and rallies, Family camp, MADD camp, Nature Camp, Triple Camp and Gap camp. The majority of the time was spent talking about mission camps and family camps. Mission camp can take several forms from being based out of church camps to being in distant cities, with the main focus on serving local communities and camping facilities. This model could also be incorporated into our current structure, as we add mission opportunities to existing camps. Family camp could also take many forms, but would focus on family ministry, play, rest and relaxation as a family. Families could enjoy meals and worship together as a community, while also having time to engage in activities around their own interests as individual families. This would provide a space for students who are traditionally too young to attend camp on their own to come with their family. It also provides a great opportunity for students with special needs to experience camp. Students whose parents are not available for family camp could be paired with an adult mentor or another family member. A hybrid model could also be utilized of any of the camps discussed. More information and MADD camp, Nature camp, Triple camp and Gap camp can be found [here](#) in an article written by Don Wilson of FCC Abilene or at <http://www.missionwestccsw.org/#/youth/info>.

After a lot of discussion, a decision was made to participate in the Created To Be Me/8ers camp in Athens at Disciples Crossing on July 6-12, 2014. We acknowledge and affirm the importance of a Mission West 8ers camp but transitions in camp leadership and scheduling conflicts made it very difficult to make it happen this year. We graciously invited to partner this year with the 8ers camp in Athens, and after much consideration, felt this option would best serve our campers during this time of transition. Carpooling will be available to get to Athens. Please contact Karakay to help coordinate this transportation. If you prayerfully feel called to leadership in a 2015 tri area 8ers camp, please talk to your local chairperson about these opportunities.

As we move forward, we ask each area council and participants in outdoor ministry to prayerfully consider what can we do better together than separately in light of the information gathered from this conversation? It is important that the conversation continues in our local contexts so we can come to consensus in the spring of 2014 in order to make arrangements for future camps. Questions to consider include: Do we utilize the same camp curriculum? Should we share common themes? Do we join forces on more camps to offer the quality desired? How do we keep camp costs affordable? How do we share our resources for the benefit of all? These are the next big questions we will face together; please join us in the conversation.

Those present at the meeting were: **Central Area**-Travis Stanley from FCC Abilene & Chair of CEA CYC, Marti Stanley from FCC Albany, TJ York From FCC Midland, and Traci Hall from LBCR. **Tres Rios Area**-Karen Velasquez from West Mesa CC in Albuquerque, Leslie Denton from West Mesa CC in Albuquerque & chair of TRA Outdoor Ministry Committee, Regina Erwin from FCC Odessa. **Hi-Plains Area**-Becca Williams from FCC Lubbock, Scott Hall from FCC Lubbock, Randa Reeves from FCC Brownfield & Co-chair of HPA CYC, Dan Kovaly from FCC Spearman & Co-chair of HPA CYC. **Area Staff**-Chuck Fisher, Hi Plains Area Minister & Karakay S. Kovaly Associate Area Youth Minister for HPA & TRA

###