

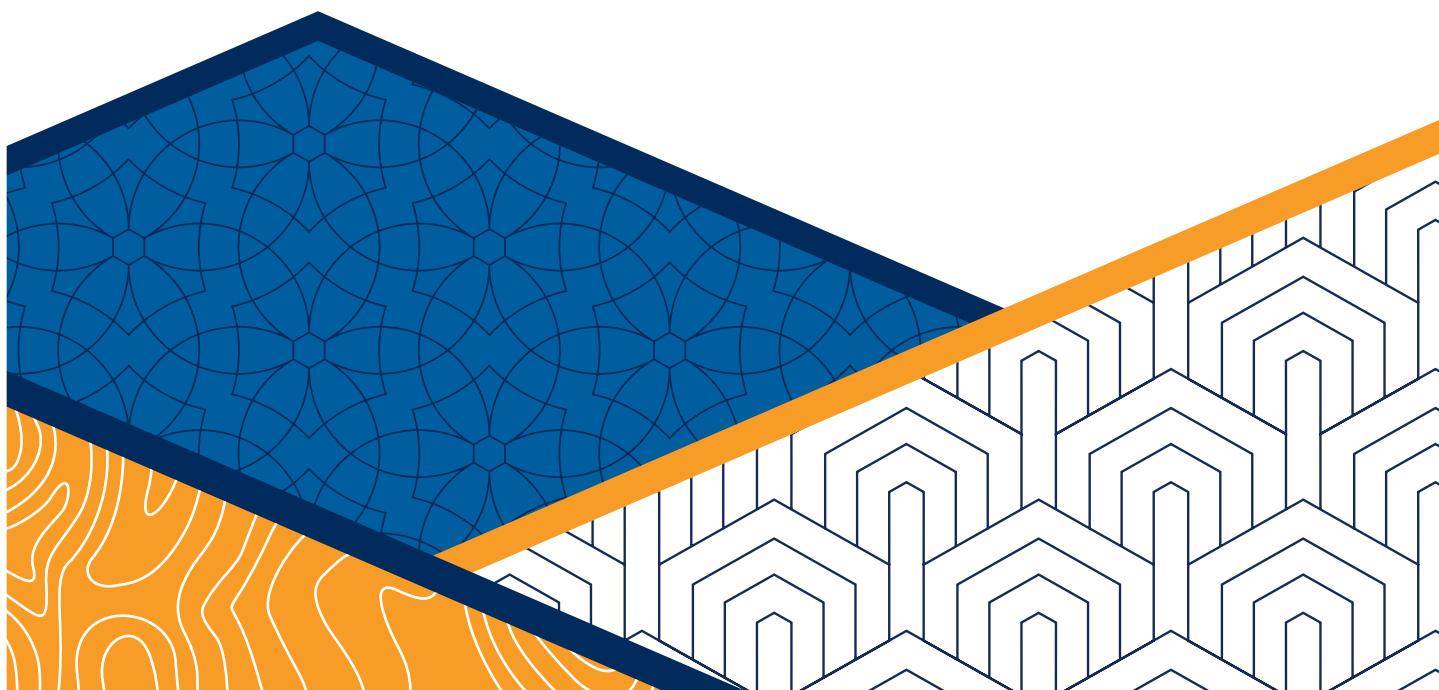


REFRAMING SUMMER CAMP

A RESOURCE FOR CHURCHES

Every year across the country millions of youth and young adults attend Christian summer camps. Research shows that these experiences can provide important opportunities to grow in faith, self-confidence, interpersonal skills and resilience, all while engaging the outdoors and living in community with others.

This resource talks about how church leadership can help reframe the role of summer camp in faith formation.





For some church leaders, Christian summer camps rank high on the list of recommended youth experiences. For others the feelings are more mixed. Often, those church leaders have seen campers come back to church with a case of the “post camp blues” and a sense of disillusionment with ‘normal’ life. These feelings make sense, given many camps can frame their programs as the “best week ever” without realizing that the phrase can cause campers to view the remaining 51 weeks of the year with a measure of disdain.

Growing Faith Together is working to change this narrative by helping camp leaders better understand the importance of partnership. However, church leaders play a key role in this effort as well.

Below is a list of ways church leaders can help integrate camp into the life of the church—helping campers and families understand that camp is a partner ministry that has a specific purpose in the life of the church.

- Take time to learn about Christian summer camp and its role in faith formation. (See “Camp as Temporary Community” Resource and consider the book “Sacred Playgrounds” by Dr. Jake Sorenson.)
- Be intentional with how you talk about camp. Make sure children and families understand that it offers important opportunities to grow in faith that build on what you are already doing.
- Reach out to local Christian summer camps where members of your congregation attend and carve out time to visit them to learn more about their mission, programs, and outcomes.
- Set aside some time during regular services to commission children as they head off to camp (see our Church Commissioning Resource)
- Invite adult members of the congregation to intentionally pray for a few campers by name each day while campers are at camp.
- Set aside time during a regular worship service in the fall to celebrate the growth and impact of the camp experience for anyone that attended. Consider:
 - Asking the campers to lead this part of the service
 - Incorporating a time of testimony by the campers
 - Singing camp worship songs
- Take time to talk with campers one-on-one or in a special small group after they come back from camp. Ask them about areas of growth and encourage them to name some ways that they want to continue growing as you walk alongside them into the fall.
- If campers had the opportunity to lead in new ways at camp (e.g. leading worship or leading a bible study), find a way for them to utilize that new skill in your church. (See “How to Help Your Camper Reflect on Their Camp Experience” and “Building Bridges” Resources).

Forming faith in the next generation is an ecological effort. In other words, it requires all of us—camps, churches, and parents—working together with the same goal in mind. By developing robust partnerships and committing to support the unique role that each component of the system plays, we’ll deepen our impact and transform the lives of young people.



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