

Young Adult Leadership: An Essential Ministry of Camp and Conference Centers

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Ah, the joy of a free summer! Schools out. What to do? Many young adults look forward to the freedom summer provides and want to take advantage of the time to recharge as well as enrich their life, no matter their journey. A large number of young adults turn to summer camp jobs. Initially they might view it as a fun job that gets them outside, which it is. However, they will soon realize it will be a life changing experience. They will be enriched in leadership, teamwork, problem solving as well as being called upon to be empathetic to the children and youth in their charge. They will also be stretched by their co-staff members who are roommates as well as workmates – a new experience for many. Camp work adds the gift of discernment – “Where is my life headed? What place will my faith play in my life?” It also provides them with pride and self confidence when they realize, “Wow! I know more than I thought I did because I have to teach my faith and share my faith with others – even if I don’t know it all!”

Summer camp work is often not a stand alone experience. Colleen Earp, Director of Youth, Environmental, and Service Ministries at Camp Hanover, shares “Camp always welcomed me and served as my faith home, and like a church should, extended into other parts of my life as well. It launched me into the PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteers program, connected me to Presbyterian Hunger Program environmental ministries, led to my participation in the Eco-Stewards Program of the PCUSA, led to my attending General Assembly as a Presbyterian Peace Fellowship intern, and ultimately to my work at Hanover. My passion is creation care. I learned that through working at camps, and now I am blessed to give back.”

Camp offers many intersections with social advocacy and mission experiences. Whether it is mission work as a camper at Calvin Crest in Nebraska or participation in an immersion experience like the Eco-Stewards Program, young adults are enriched by faithfully encountering their life path. Rev. Rob Mark, pastor of Church of the Covenant in Boston shares, “Since 2007, the Eco-Steward Program has offered a unique opportunity in our church to be away with leaders in earth care, participate in intentional personal and corporate discernment, and learn applicable skills in caring for creation. We are called to enrich and train our young adults to follow God’s call in their life and camp offers a wonderful venue for those experiences.”

Camps can offer a deeper discernment and training. Many young adults are called to internships after or even during their college years. Our camps have space, leadership, church connections, and hands on experience to offer. Young adult intern programs are popping up all over the country at PC(USA) affiliated camps. Paul Humpreys of Camp Crestfield in Pittsburgh Presbytery shares, “Our camp and conference offer young adults an opportunity to continue their “holy addiction” to camp life while safely and graciously exploring future ministry or another vocation. The challenge for camp professionals is to provide that nurturing space for faith/life discernment without reinforcing the “bubble” that camp sometimes creates.”

Community practices are a natural part of summer camp as well. Young adults learn the rhythm of faith practices while leading camp communities in bible study and worship. Increasingly, our camps are taking those practices like prayer and study and helping young adults stay connected beyond their time at camp. Westminster Woods in Redwoods Presbytery in California launched In-Spire to reach young adults with a Taize-based worship experience. Camp staff experience this worship style daily in the summer so it was a natural extension to provide that experience year round. Each month, young adults come from as far as four hours away to participate. This innovative weaving of camp practices and a life of faith may give us a glimpse of what church community will look like in the future.

National PC(USA) leadership is listening. Each year 15,000 young adults are served by summer camp ministry in some capacity. The Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) is engaging in this young adult ministry by gathering leaders of internship programs, sharing best practices and skill training with camp leadership, participating in shaping programs like the Eco-stewards program and actively working to seed communities of practice like in-spire and connect those experience across ministries like collegiate ministries and ministries with you. What comes next is sure to inspire and enrich our connectional ministries in unique and life-giving ways.

How will you engage with your camp and young adult development? How can the national church through the PMA help you?

You can reach PC(USA) camping through:

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On the web at <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/campandconference>

On Twitter [@pcusacamps](https://twitter.com/pcusacamps)

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