

Camps, the Environment, and the Experience of God



**THE UNIQUE ROLE CAMPS CAN PLAY IN
CHANGING THE WAY WE INTERACT WITH
OUR WORLD**

JORDAN BLEVINS
JBLEVINS@NCCCUSA.ORG

Symptoms of a Larger Problem



The clear-cutting of forests around the world...

Symptoms of a Larger Problem



**Pollution and emissions
destroying our air
and our climate...**



Symptoms of a Larger Problem



**Stronger
and
stronger
storms and
natural
disasters...**



Symptoms of a Larger Problem



**Thousands of other
species in danger...**



The Larger Problem



Our
relationship
with each other,
God, and the
world...



The Larger Problem



- **WE NEED TO RETURN TO VIEWING THE WORLD AS CREATED BY GOD**
 - **INSTEAD OF TREATING THE REST OF CREATION AS OURS TO BE IN AND USE**
 - **IT IS GOD'S, ENTRUSTED TO OUR CARE**
- **HOW WE TREAT THIS WORLD, HOW WE LIVE IN THIS WORLD, REFLECTS THE RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH GOD**



Camps are uniquely positioned to address this problem; particularly with the next generation



Part of the Solution



One of the first places I remember having a truly Holy experience was in the wilderness of Western Maryland. I was at church camp: Sheperd's Spring Outdoor Ministry Center, to be exact.

Through nature hikes, canoe trips, and weighing our waste, the idea of the world as God's Creation was imprinted on my soul – and the importance of living in harmony with it.



Where I first made the connection...

The Role of Camps



**CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTERS HAVE A
UNIQUE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY TO PLAY
IN PROTECTING GOD'S CREATION AND
MAINTAINING PLACES WHERE PEOPLE OF
FAITH COME TO EXPERIENCE GOD.**



Places of wilderness and solitude are places where we often experience the sacredness of Creation most clearly, and are places where God meets us, sometimes most powerfully. Whether as the site of Moses' call, the Israelites' freedom and consecration, the inspiration of prophets, the testing of Jesus, or our own experiences today, the solitude of being with God in the midst of Creation often reacquaints us with our interdependence with that Creation.



Places where people experience the Holy...



Imparting Values to the Next Generation

This might be the most important role camps play. By passing on the values of Creation Care to the next generation of people, and showing them the depth of the experience of the Holy that comes in that Creation, the foundations can be laid to change the larger problem...





It is also what you do...

What does it mean if we plant trees at camp, but use toxic chemicals in our cleaning? Push walking and enjoying nature, yet build in an unsustainable way? Camps have the ability to put the totality of living in harmony with God's Creation on display, and to make it a reality for millions of people



Being Holistic



- **Camp and conference centers also have the opportunity to be holistic in their approach, and make their facilities in line with the values they are imparting**
- **This provides lessons the kids, and others who visit, can take home, and practical ways they can envelop the Creation Care learned into their everyday lives**

Things to do...



- To conserve energy in as many ways as possible, recognizing that our use of energy is a justice issue, as the impacts of energy's overuse falls on those living in poverty first. Conservation relates to our call to care for all of God's children, especially the most vulnerable, and to protect and restore God's creation. These calls to care find union in love. Love for nature and love for human beings go hand in hand.
- To use water sparingly, recognizing that good water management plays a vital role in realizing the importance of water for all persons and creatures dependent upon water and the riparian environments surrounding bodies of water .
- To reduce, reuse, and recycle our waste in as many ways as possible, seeking to achieve sustainability. Finding alternative uses for our waste is a tangible action that reminds us of the interdependence of the world, and seeks to sustain the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together.
- To purchase environmentally sustainable products, including fair trade goods and locally grown foods, as recognition that how we live our lives and make purchasing decisions have profound environmental and other social justice impacts.

Things to do...



- To consider the sacred nature of land and wilderness as a part of God's Creation when making decisions about how to use the lands we have been blessed with,
- To offer prayers of thanksgiving for the bounty we enjoy in our lives – in terms of food, well being, and the ability to experience God's glorious Creation, and prayers of hope for the majority in the world who survive without adequate food, water, housing, and other necessities of life.
- To continue to educate and inspire those who come as participants and guests to our camp and conference centers along with the wider community, local churches and judicatories. We are in unique settings and callings to be voices that lift the sacred nature of the Creation and to invite persons into meaningful experiences and relationships with natural environments and other forms of life that God also brought forth in love and calls us to protect and love.
- To model creation care and lifestyles of faithfulness in our camp and retreat center designs, daily operations, practices and policies and procedures, so that guests groups, participants, families, congregations and the community at large can see that living simply and new technologies can be implemented and make a difference as part of Christian discipleship.



Change Lives, Change the World

Camp and conference centers lay at the center of the problem, and can have a huge impact.

By providing places to experience the Holy, and then providing resources and lessons for what to do with that experience, the foundation can be laid for great things.

