

## RETHINKING CHURCH CAMP

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I grew up in the fabled “Happy Days” of the last century and went to Mahoning Valley Christian Service Camp every summer. I met my wife there and we spent our first summer of marriage working in camps and starting a new church. After 6 years of missionary work in Africa, we came back to become the first full-time manager/caretaker at Rainbow Christian Camp of Pearson’s Mill Christian Assembly, Inc. It was the late 60s and change was “blowin’ in the wind.”

Back in the 40’s and 50’s, a tent or an old chicken shed, a straw-stuffed mattress, water from the hand pump, and meat & potatoes was all we expected. Today campers want a foam mattress, a hot shower, and great food. They want variety so we offer different kinds of camping. We have primitive jungle hut tree houses or Thai huts over the swamp or, cement block dorms with indoor showers & toilets with overhead & exhaust fans, or a modern air-conditioned year-round retreat center. They can choose buffet meals or they can help cook their own over a campfire. They still get to sleep on foam mattresses and have access to the bath house/swimming pool. Initiative games and high-ropes courses and wilderness trips add to the variety.

The schedules and methods may differ but the purpose never changes. The Bible is our only guide pointing to Jesus as our only hope. Church camps still must be Bible based, Christ centered, and Mission minded. We need church camp more than ever. It’s not your grandfather’s camp any more. It’s your grandchild’s camp reaching out to the changing world with the unchanging Gospel. It’s better than ever.

The all-season Conference/Retreat Center has opened the door to the community and schools year-round. Camps are now able to have more of a mission outreach to “other” kids. Camps are growing and they need your help to make the resultant changes good ones.

The leadership is doing their best to reach and teach the next generation and sometimes they become impatient with critics. It’s easy to criticize something you don’t understand. The squeaky wheel may just need the oil of communication. If you have a complaint, get informed and involved. See the big picture. If it needs fixing, help fix it. Be part of the solution and not the problem.

We need cooperation without compromise, association instead of exclusion, dialog instead of debate, and tolerance instead of approval. Real tolerance is not endorsing what’s wrong; it’s enduring someone who thinks it is right. My dummy Gabby says, “You don’t have to accept your brother’s stupid ideas. You just have to love your stupid brother.” I wrote the following verse to the tune of “Sisters” to show the way church camp managers have to think today:

“Think Camp, Think Camp, whatever we are doing, we RETHINK CAMP.  
Whether going shopping or to see a show, we think about Church Camp as we go.  
Work late, can’t wait to get up real early and facilitate.  
Folks think we should be always there to deal with problems when they occur.  
Change keeps coming and we keep running to rethink Camp and improve.  
Methods are many and changes plenty but the Message must never move. No sir.  
Families neglected. This wasn’t really what we had expected.  
But they know we balance everything out the best we can.  
Directors are praying as they listen to what people are saying.  
We all want God’s leading to help us rethink our plan. RETHINK”

***By Rod Cameron – December 2005***

*\*Rod & Bev Cameron are the retired management team of Rainbow Christian Camp of Pearson’s Mill Christian Assembly, Inc. (1967-2003), Converse, IN 46919. They were given the Wade/Matthews award for longevity and achievement at the National Christian Camp Leaders Conference in February of 2002.*  
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