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MAKING UNITY A REALITY

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This article originally appeared in Edify (Spring 2001), CBM's free newsletter for camp directors. If you would like to begin to receive a free copy of Edify bi-annually, just send your camp name and address to us. Permission is granted to duplicate and copy this material.

It was my first year as Summer Program Director. I had five years prior experience in camp ministry and felt ready for whatever would come my way. My first goal was to build a unified staff. I had programs and team building exercises that were “guaranteed” to bring unity among the program and support staff. My vision did not fulfill its ultimate goal that summer.

Disunity often occurs when you gather individuals together for a summer who are different ages with different skills, interests and levels of spiritual maturity. You can borrow team building games and lectures from secular psychology, but as Christians we have something else to offer. We have Christ and His Word.

Since my first summer, I have grown in my maturity with Christ, and have tried many different approaches. I have also talked with many directors who want their staff to be growing in the grace of God's Word, but feel helpless when staff arrive and all do not share the same vision and goals. There is no need to feel helpless because staff members have unity in the Person of Christ, in their purpose for ministry, and in their practice of the faith. These three areas can make unity a reality.

1. Unity in the Person of Christ. The best place to start when addressing the spiritual formation and unity of staff is with the basics. Even the Apostle Paul needed to remind churches of this simple truth—that in Christ we are all one (1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4). Staff training week should include a theological section that stresses the oneness of the body of Christ. All those whose salvation rests on the merits of Christ's work on the cross are given the right to be called children of God (1 John 3:1). All believers are one in Christ through faith. There is no greater bond of unity than this. It matters not whether you are white or black, young or old, male or female, athletic or not athletic; all believers are one in the Person of Christ (Galatians 3:26-28).

I say that this is a foundational truth because it is the truth upon which all other concepts of growth and unity are based. Even though staff members may differ at certain theological points, they must never allow themselves to forget the truth that all believers have been adopted as God's children—heirs with Christ.

God uses all people. In fact, God has given each person special gifts which are needed for ministry. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that the church is like a body. That analogy can also apply to camp staff as well. God calls staff members who have different abilities so that campers can be ministered to in a special way. Each one is needed.

I remember when I first began counseling, I felt so out of place because I was not athletic. My fellow staff members were swimmers and soccer players. I had nothing to offer—or so I thought. However, God used me that first summer because He had special campers that needed someone who did not play sports. New staff especially need to be reminded of this encouraging truth. There can be no unity when one staff member feels inferior to another. There can be no unity if even one member of the camp family feels unwanted or of no use to the camp or to God.

2. *Unity in Purpose.* Even though camp staff members are diverse in many ways, and are consequently hired to fulfill different tasks at camp, all staff members are ultimately fulfilling one purpose—leading campers to Christ. Every task at camp needs to be focused on this one purpose.

According to 1 Peter 4:10-11 spiritual gifts can basically be summed up in two categories. There are gifts of speaking and gifts of ministry. In the camp setting, the gifts of speaking would include counselors, chaplains, and other program staff. The gifts of ministry, as defined by 1 Peter 4, are gifts of service and stewardship (i.e. support staff). Both gifts are to be accomplished so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (v. 11).

All staff members should be at camp for one main purpose and that is to glorify God by presenting Christ to youth. This is not only done by counselors who teach and work with them, it is done when a camper sees a staff person clean the bathrooms with a positive attitude. It is done when staff are united to help the front lines of ministry to be more effective in their work. Even if a camp is just a rental camp, the staff's attitude can show others the joy of knowing Christ and serving Him.

3. *Unity in Practice.* So how does one take this theology of being united in Christ and united in the camp's purpose and make it work? Theology must be put into practice or it only serves to puff up. Directors can lecture and teach staff the philosophy of being united in Christ and stress the importance of striving toward a higher unified goal, but unless that becomes habitual for the staff, it is soon forgotten.

It is in the area of practice that many directors feel most frustrated. It is not easy to find ways in which the staff, as a whole, can develop spiritually through the summer. It takes dedication and a real desire to see that growth in order for it to happen. One cannot simply *want* spiritual growth, he has to be thoroughly and prayerfully *committed* to it. Directors are burdened with many things during the summer, but I am convinced that this area needs to be a priority. As important as having food for campers, providing spiritual nourishment for the staff is just as necessary.

The first step is to have daily prayer and devotions together as a staff. Support staff should be invited to the counselors prayer time so that they can feel involved by praying for campers and program needs. There is no way for work crew members to feel involved if they are not given this information.

But it cannot stop there. Group devotions are no substitute for individual quiet time with the Lord. Staff cannot expect to minister to campers when they themselves are not being ministered to through God's Word. About five years ago I made personal quiet time a priority for my staff. The devotional books produced each summer by Character Building Ministries make an excellent tool to aid your staff in personal devotions.

Just because I give staff members these books, however, does not automatically mean they use them. I have to make an effort to conscientiously follow up. I place quotes and Scripture from the day's devotion on a chalkboard located in a central area. When I see staff members, I ask them, "What did you find most beneficial about today's devotion?" I ask how they can apply it to their ministry, or what was most challenging or encouraging. This shows them that I am serious

about their spiritual growth and that it is a priority.

Finally, it takes your prayers and dedication. We are one in Christ and one in our purpose to present Him before others, so we must practice the means by which that becomes possible—prayer and study of God's Word.

This just scratches the surface of what can and needs to be done to promote spiritual growth and unity among staff. Not every staff person may use what you offer, but as directors there is an obligation before God to provide the means for staff to be growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.