



# **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT WITH COLLEGE AGED STAFF**

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# ABOUT COLLEGE AGED PEOPLE

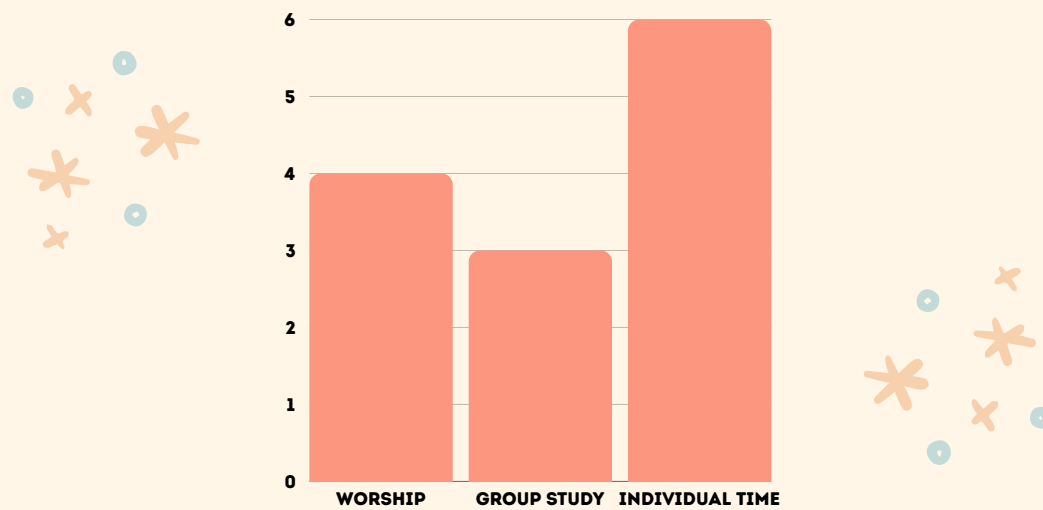


A typical Gen Zer is a self-driver who deeply cares about others, strives for a diverse community, is highly collaborative and social, values flexibility, **relevance**, **authenticity** and **non-hierarchical leadership**, and, while dismayed about inherited issues like climate change, has a pragmatic attitude about **the work that has to be done** to address those issues.

—Roberta Katz

- Gen Z are 12-27 years old (born 1997-2012), so right now includes campers, summer staff, and some year-round/program directors/etc.
- Generational theories are a helpful starting place (bold words are some things that will come up here), but not the end all be all.

# WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN YOUR PERSONAL FAITH LIFE?



Asked Camp Hopewell summer staff a series of questions -- 8 responded, about 1/3 of the group.

Question: when you're not at camp, which of these things are important to your personal faith life?

1. spending time in individual prayer/reflection
2. attending regular worship services
3. participating in regular Bible study/planned conversation time

Speaks to Gen Z lack of strong need for institutional structure -- they're not necessarily against it, but it's also not necessarily a priority.

# WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR PERSONAL FAITH LIFE?

- Consistency
- Resources for choosing what Scriptures to study.
- "I feel like I am unsure of how to live through God and be a 'good' Christian."



Question: When you're not at camp, what do you feel like is missing in your personal faith life?

Consistency:

- "I wish I made more dedicated time."
- "God feels like more like a general presence than a friend."
- Want more day to day connection. Hard to recognize God/religion in busy/stressful times.

Resources for choosing:

- Same person: "Without a clear path, I often forget to read my Bible or don't make time for it, then feel guilty."

"Good Xian"

- A different person: "Currently at school lots of students have so many different ideas, and have many conversations about what denominations are "wrong and evil" it's a negative environment when they talk about faith"

# WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN A FAITH COMMUNITY?

- Knowing people who go there.
- Opportunity to connect with people like me.
- Opportunity to connect with people different from me.
- Meeting times that fit into my schedule.
- Theological beliefs of the community.
- Engaging in social justice issues as a community of faith.

Question: When you're not at camp, what things are most important to you when choosing a faith community to be part of?

(These are the choices they got in the question. See next slide for ranking.)

# WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN A FAITH COMMUNITY?

- 5 • Knowing people who go there.
- 1 • Opportunity to connect with people like me.
- 1 • Opportunity to connect with people different from me.
- 3 • Meeting times that fit into my schedule.
- 4 • Theological beliefs of the community.
- 2 • Engaging in social justice issues as a community of faith.
  - Feeling welcome without judgment.

Question: When you're not at camp, what things are most important to you when choosing a faith community to be part of?

Specific comments:

#1 7 people

#2 6 people

#3 5 people

#4 4 people

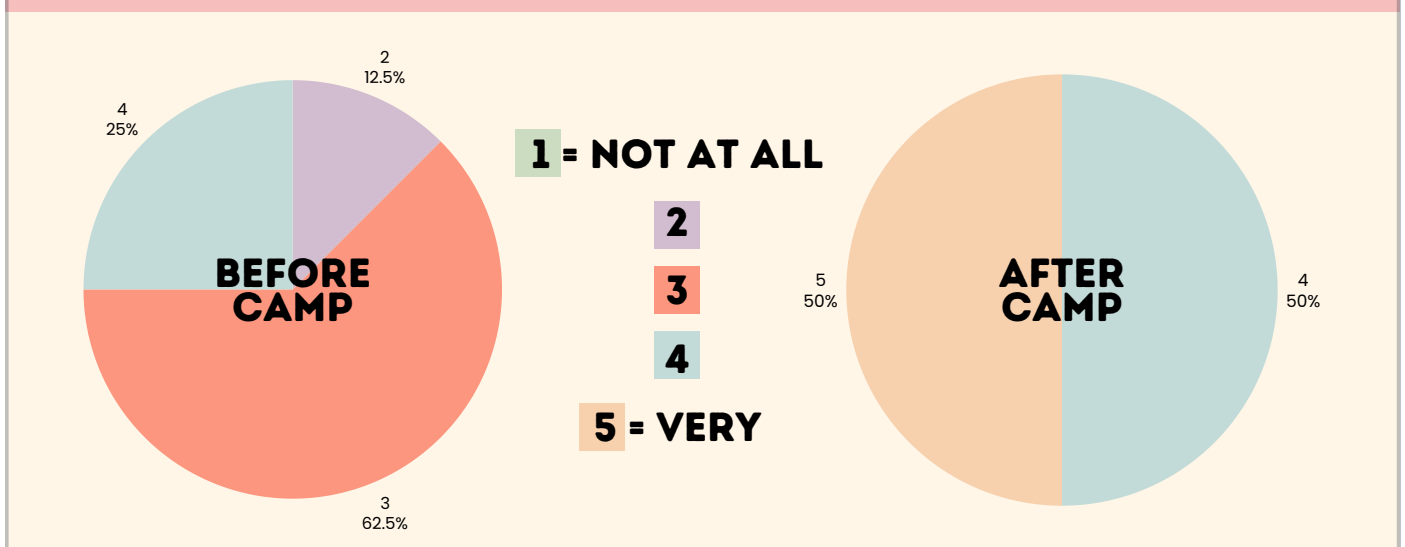
#5 1 person

#2 calls back to Gen Z trait of wanting to engage

"Denomination is less important to me than practice is. I choose where I go because of the way they worship, not the name of their church."

"I think having people who are queer and queer affirming is very important to me but that I really enjoy connecting with people alike and different from me in this way because it's very interesting to hear other people's thoughts who may or may not agree with me"

# HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR PERSONAL FAITH?



"Confident" not in the sense of having everything figured out, but in being able to articulate where you are with it.

Before:

- 1 person said level 1
- 5 people said level 3
- 2 people said level 4

After: 4 people each for level 4 and level 5 (very confident)

Everyone except one person (who stayed the same) noted an increase in confidence.



# PERSONAL FAITH: WHAT HELPED?

- Being around likeminded people.
- Stepping out of the stresses of normal life.
- "Hearing reassuring stories about how God loves everyone, rather than telling people what they shouldn't do."
- "Proximity to people whose priority was love first, rules second."

Question: If you said your confidence in your personal faith grew over the summer, what made a difference?

Community is important -- goes back to Gen Z valuing authenticity. They aren't going to buy in to a community that they don't feel like buys into them.

Staff need the messages as much as campers do.

# PERSONAL FAITH: WHAT HELPED?

- “Existing in a community where questions are accepted, and being provided answers to those questions or an ‘I don’t know either and that’s okay’ is really reassuring.”
- Planning and being part of worships.

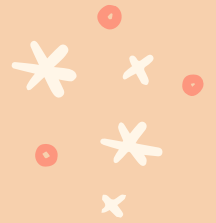


Question: If you said your confidence in your personal faith grew over the summer, what made a difference?

A couple mentions for both of these.

Pause - any questions about the staff responses?

# STAFF TRAINING



- Opening & Closing Worship
- Morning Devotions
- Bible Study & Worship Planning Day
  - Presby 101
  - Plan Bible Study
  - Plan Worship
- Sabbath Afternoon
- Practice Worship Services

Faith-related things that are part of staff training at Camp Hopewell.

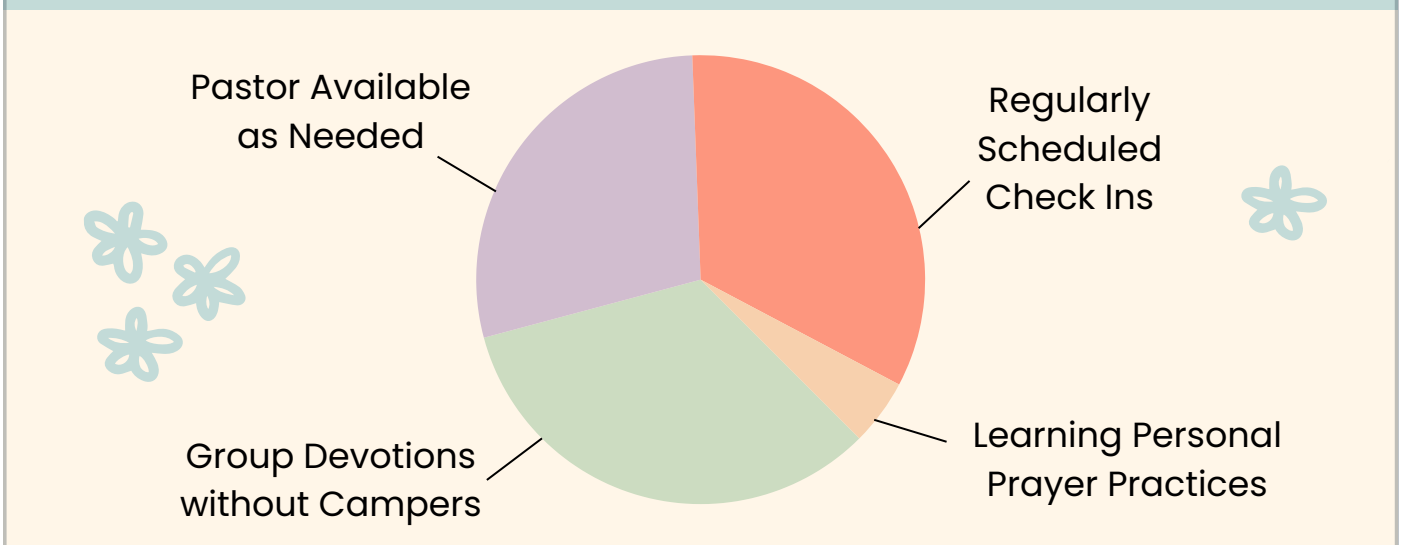
We try to offer creative prayer/worship practices throughout.

BS & Worship Planning: Staff are split up into small groups, each small group has one day that they plan Bible Study and Worship for, then plans are shared/adjusted based on feedback and practice. All counselors lead Bible study with their cabin groups each week, and each small group leads their worship service that night every week.

Sabbath afternoon is choose-your-own-quiet-adventure, but includes a printed booklet of prayer/reflection practices for those who want them.

Other faith-related things you do during staff training?

# HOW CAN WE BEST SUPPORT YOU DURING CAMP?



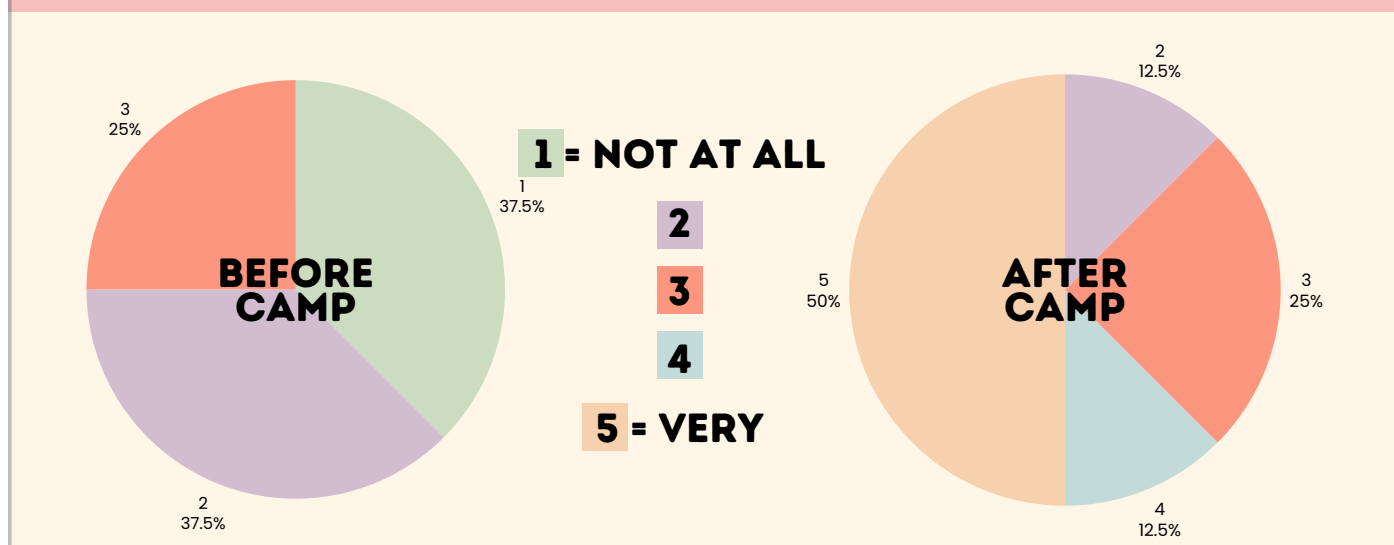
Question: How can we (directors/year-round staff) best support you during the busy camp season?

- Scheduled check ins and group devo time tied w/ 7 people
- Pastor available: 6 people
- Learning personal practices: 1 person

Low response on learning different practices is interesting contrast to focus on individual spiritual time when asked what parts are most important.

What else do you do?

# HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN LEADING OTHERS?



Question: How confident are you in leading/facilitating other people in faith-related conversations and experiences?

Same general upward trend as personal faith question -- nobody got less confident about either thing. About half increased by 2 or more.

Personal/leadership are connected -- can be tempting to only focus on training how to lead etc, but when we invest in young people's spiritual wellbeing on a personal level it affect the bigger picture too.

Some reasons why were same as personal growth:

- being around likeminded people (people of faith)
- planning/leading BS & Worship

# BEING A FAITH LEADER: WHAT HELPED?

- Feeling more prepared.
- Being around other Christians.
- Daily devotions at staff meeting.
- "I was a spritiual leader whether I accepted it or not...I wanted to step it up for [the campers]."

Question: If your confidence leading faith conversations/experiences improved, what helped?

Feeling more prepared - different person mentioned participating in BS/Worship planning again.

# BEING A FAITH LEADER: WHAT HELPED?

“I came from a small church with nobody my age, no open discussions of faith, and no judgment-free resources, but coming to camp I came to find how much I really enjoy a discussion of faith, like our staff devotionals. These devos, leading Bible study for my campers, and being involved in worship changed my perspective on leading...”

Question: If your confidence leading faith conversations/experiences improved, what helped?

Quote from long time camper, second-year staffer

# BEING A FAITH LEADER: WHAT HELPED?

“I think having conversations with other staff, and with campers, gets you in the practice of sharing your faith in a lower stakes environment -- that allows you to learn how to share in more diverse environments.”

Question: If your confidence leading faith conversations/experiences improved, what helped?

Quote from returning staffer (former group counselor, most recently leadership staff)





# WHAT ELSE?



Question: what else do you want camp directors to know about being a college-aged person in 2024?

"[College is] a stressful time that entails a large gap of learning between where we are in life and where we want to be/will be and it takes a lot of work so be patient with us we're doing our best (generally)."

"I think it's important to remember that most, if not all, college age people are frequently in a state of uncertainty. I think that directors need to take that idea of uncertainty and use it as an opportunity to help shape the young people around them in a positive way because they can also very easily shape them in a negative way."