

# FINDINGS REPORT

SACR.PL/OMCDIRECTOR



REPORT SUPPLEMENT

## Lutheran Outdoor Ministries

PREPARED BY



SACRED  
PLAYGROUNDS

SPRING 2025





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# Introduction

This report is designed as a supplement to the 2024-25 OMC Director Report, which summarizes data from 249 respondents representing 307 individual sites across six outdoor ministry associations affiliated with Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC). Partnering associations included United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association, Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, Outdoor Ministry Association of the United Church of Christ, and United Church of Canada Outdoor Ministries. For complete results and more thorough data analysis, see the full report, which had an 78% completion rate and a 47% response rate.

This report supplement presents data specific to ministry centers affiliated with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM). These data are at times compared with the other OMC ministries that responded and other times compared with past data from LOM respondents.

## How to Use This Report

**Share** survey findings with your organization’s camp directors.

**Discuss** key survey findings with your ministry center’s staff or board of directors.

**Compare** your site’s philosophy and statistical data with the larger camping network.

## In This Report

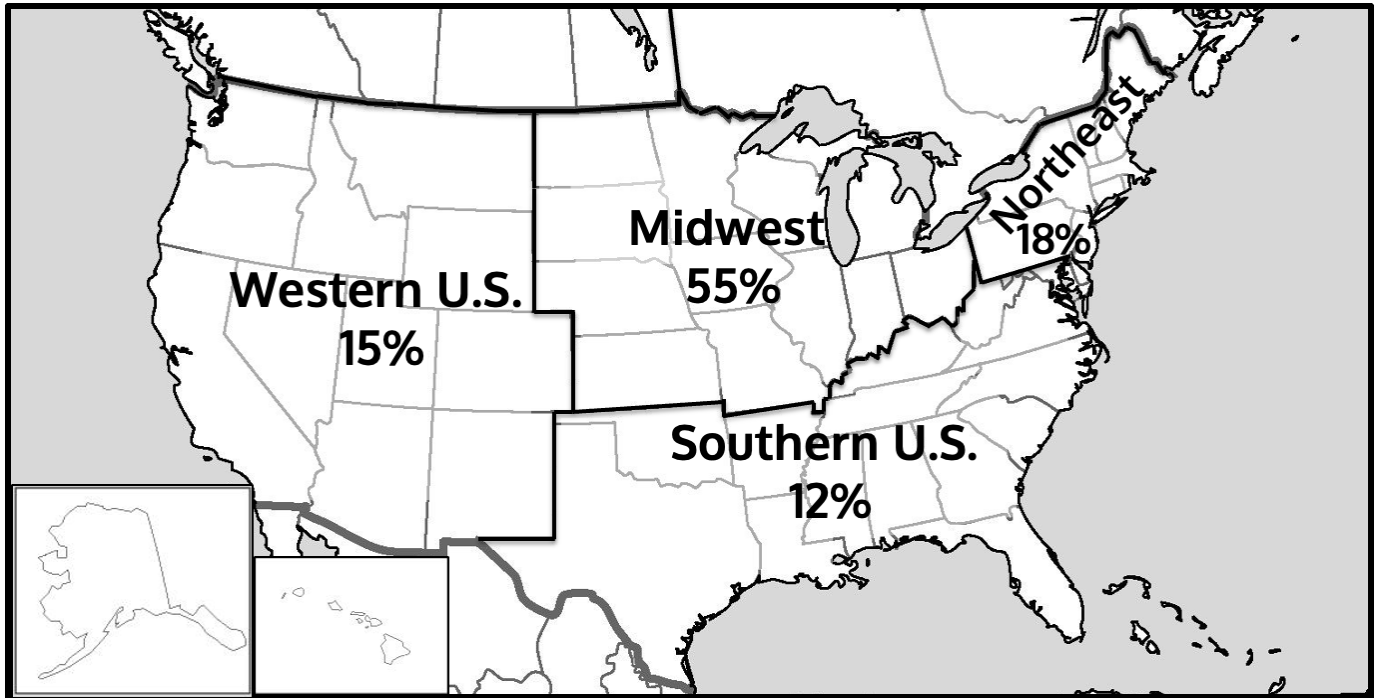
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# Ministry Site Overview

66 Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) organizations responded to the survey, representing 90 ministry sites.

**FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDING MINISTRIES, BY REGION, *n*=66**



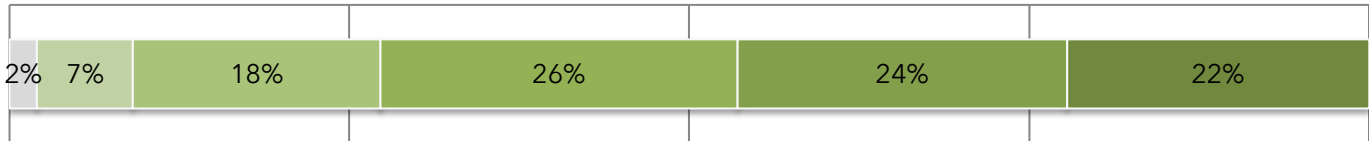
## General Ministry Site Overview

- 76% of respondents were at a single-site ministry, while the other 24% had an organization representing multiple sites (half of these had 2 sites and the other half had 3 sites)
- 91% of respondents indicated their ministry center is open year-round
- 85% Mixed-Use Sites: offered summer camp programming alongside other programming, such as retreats, conferences, and user groups
- 12% Primarily Summer Camps: limited or no other programs
- 3% indicated that they did not offer summer camp programs



## Property

FIGURE 4: PROPERTY SIZE IN ACRES, n=64



■ No property ■ Less than 50 acres ■ 50-100 acres ■ 101-250 acres ■ 251-500 acres ■ More than 500 acres

- 74% had more than 100 acres of property
- The average individual site was 361 acres, but the median was 227 acres

## Full-time Employment

- 5% had no full-time staff members
- 8% employed 1 full-time staff member
- 22% employed 2-3
- 20% employed 4-5
- 28% employed 6-10
- 17% employed 11 or more

## Employment Summary *(including full-time and part-time staff)*

- A third of outdoor ministry sites had 7 or fewer paid staff people (this included 10% operating with 1-2 paid staff or none at all)
- Another third had between 8 and 12 paid staff members
- The remaining third had more than 12 paid staff members (including 10% with more than 30 staff)

## Vacancies

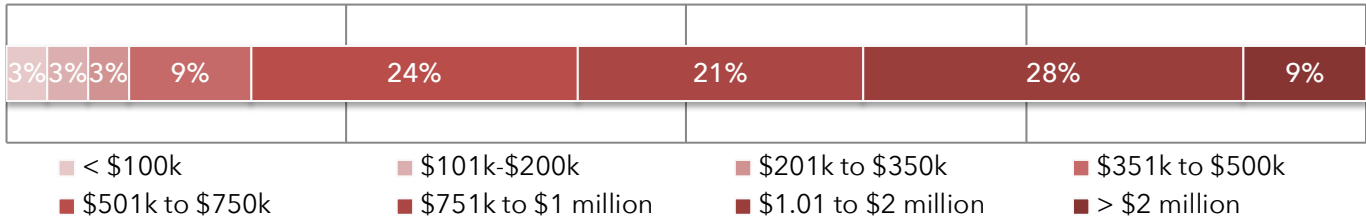
- Of the ministry centers reporting that they employed year-round staff people, 33% indicated that they currently had one or more staff vacancies, including 5% that had 3 or more vacancies.

## Accreditation

- 65% of U.S. ministry centers were accredited through the American Camp Association (ACA), up from 63% in 2022 and 57% in 2018.
- 14% were members of the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA)

## Annual Operating Budget in 2024

FIGURE 5A · n=66



## Fundraising & Donations Revenue in Comparison with Previous Year

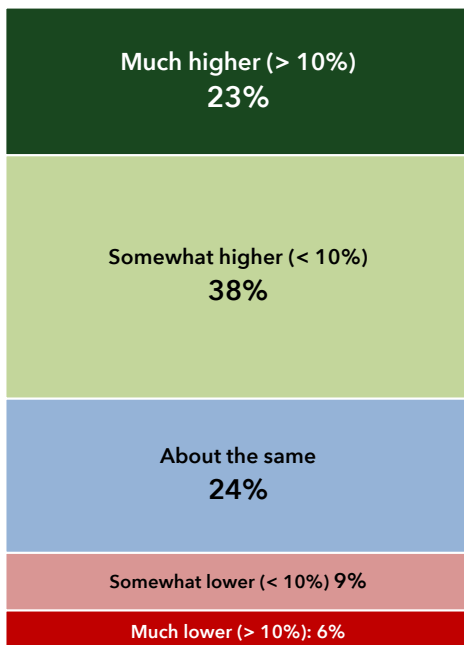


FIGURE 5B · n=66

Fundraising was generally up in 2024 across LOM centers, with 61% of respondents indicating their revenue from fundraising and donations was higher than in the previous fiscal year and only 15% indicating lower fundraising revenue. Organizations with higher annual budgets reported more consistent increases in fundraising revenue.

FIGURE 5C: % REPORTING INCREASED FUNDRAISING REVENUE, BY ANNUAL BUDGET CATEGORY

Budget Category	Higher than 2023
Budget: \$200,000 or less	50%
Budget: \$201k to \$500k	63%
Budget: \$501k to \$1 million	53%
Budget: \$1.01 to \$2 million	67%
Budget: over \$2 million	83%
<b>All Ministry Centers</b>	<b>61%</b>

## Director Confidence That Ministry Center will be Operating in 5 years

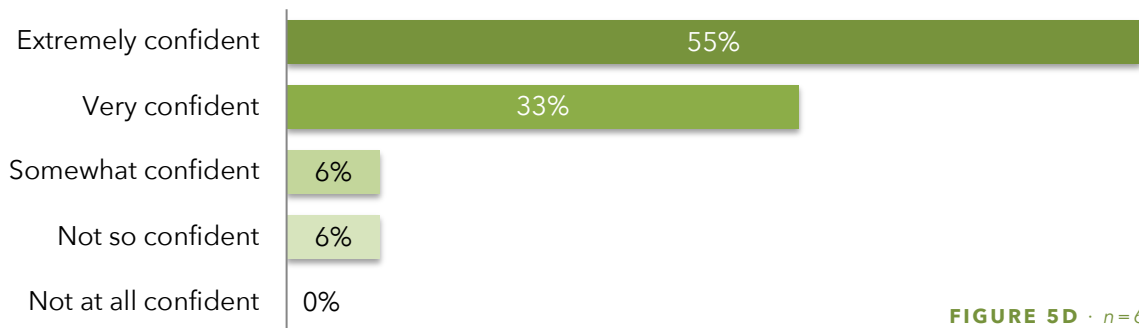


FIGURE 5D · n=66

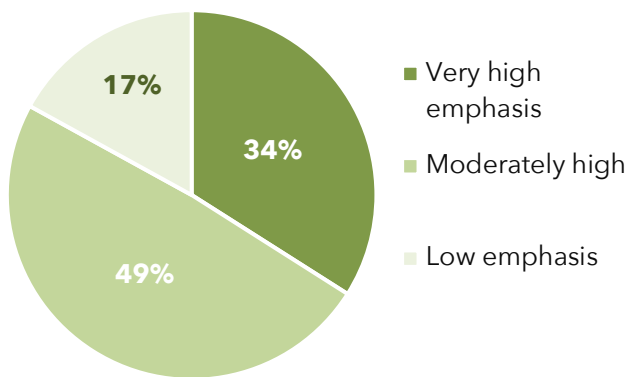


# Congregational Connection

One of the key assets of Christian outdoor ministries is their connection to reliable partners in their supporting congregational ministries. The stronger this connection, the more support the ministry center enjoys. When the OMC survey began in 2014 with Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and United Methodist ministries, 58% of responding directors indicated that “strengthening/supporting congregations” was “very” or “extremely important” to the philosophy of their ministry center. The average importance assigned to this priority has declined steadily since. Additionally, connections to congregational ministries continue to weaken. Your individual association’s emphasis on faith teachings and connection to congregational ministries are summarized below.

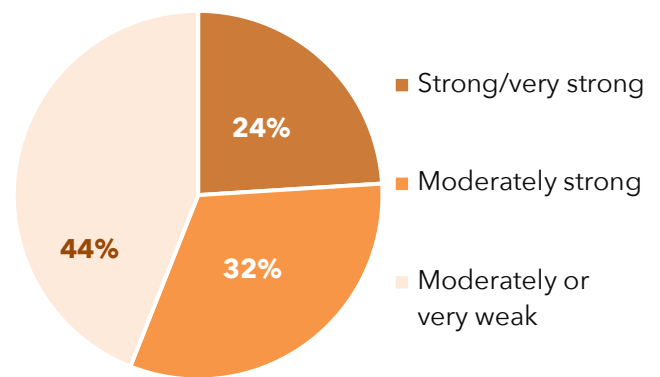
## Director Impressions of Center’s Emphasis on Faith and Christian Teachings

FIGURE 6A



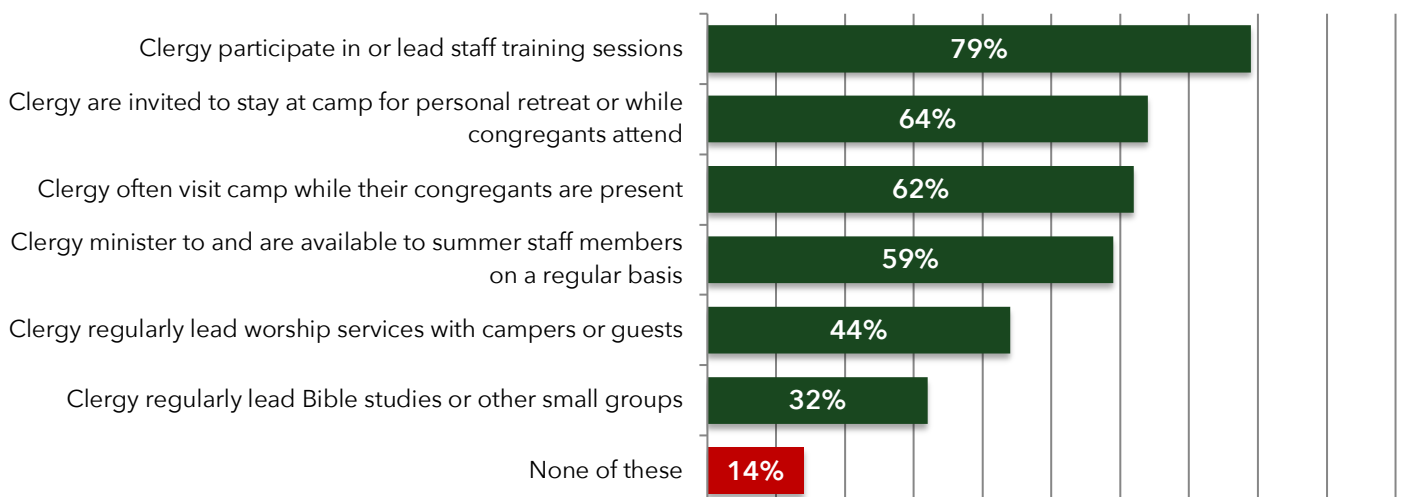
## Director Impressions of Connection to Congregational Ministries & Faith Tradition

FIGURE 6B



## Ways Clergy are Involved During the Summer Months

FIGURE 6C, n=63





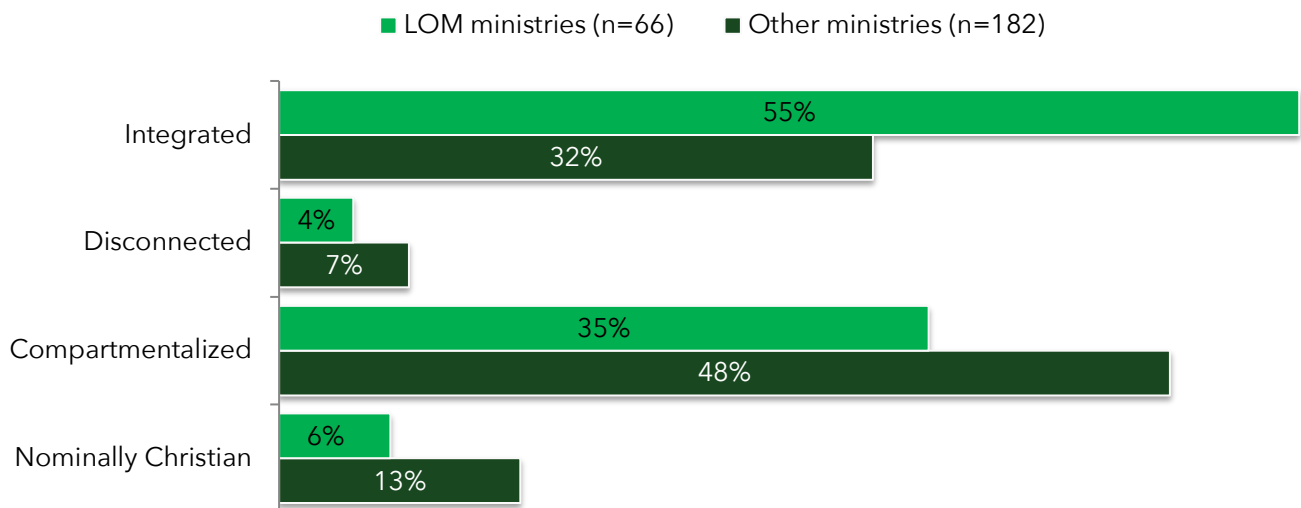
# Outdoor Ministry Type

Based on responses to multiple survey questions, ministry sites were categorized by their connection to congregational ministries/denominational teachings (weak connection, moderately weak, moderately strong, and strong connection) and the emphasis placed on faith/Christian practices (low, moderately low, moderately high, very high). Combining these two categories reveals four general types of mainline Protestant outdoor ministries:

1. **Nominally Christian:** Low faith emphasis, weak connection to congregations/denominational ministries
2. **Compartmentalized:** Moderate faith emphasis, moderate connection
3. **Disconnected:** High faith emphasis, weak connection to congregations/denominations
4. **Faith-Integrated:** High faith emphasis, strong connection to congregations/denominations

## Camp Type, LOM Ministries in Comparison to Other OMC

FIGURE 7, n=66





# THREAT ASSESSMENT

The following were identified as the greatest threats facing Lutheran Outdoor Ministries camps by directors in the 2024 OMC Directors Survey. This data set consists of **64 responses**.



THREAT #1

## Church Engagement

Directors identified challenges related to church engagement. They referenced declining congregation participation, dwindling youth ministries, and decreased interest and influence in the church as a whole. Competition and busy schedules were a common thread of perceived causation in declining church engagement.

Identified as a Top Threat **48%**  
31 of 65

Identified as the #1 Threat **27%**  
18 of 65



THREAT #2

## Costs

Rising costs and inflation were a significant, common threat identified by directors. Specifics included costs of food, supplies, and staffing. Note that fundraising, general finance, and the economy were broken out into their own categories. Combined, financially-related issues remain a significant threat.

Identified as a Top Threat **43%**  
28 of 65

Identified as the #1 Threat **12%**  
8 of 65



THREAT #3

## Camper Numbers

The number of registered campers continues to be a challenge for LOM camps. Directors identified regular camper registrations for both summer and year-round opportunities, as well as user group utilization. Some referenced continued challenges recovering in participation and use from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Identified as a Top Threat **37%**  
24 of 65

Identified as the #1 Threat **17%**  
11 of 65

### TOP Ten

While the areas above represent the top 3 threats identified, the following round out the top ten threat categories along with the number of directors identifying each.

1. Church Engagement	31	6. Infrastructure/Site	20
2. Costs	28	7. Fundraising	17
3. Camper Numbers	24	8. General Finances	13
4. Culture/Society	21	9. Marketing	4
5. Staffing	20	10. Constituency	3



# Threat Assessment Comparison



1. Church Engagement
2. Costs
3. Camper Numbers
4. Culture/Society
5. Staffing
5. Infrastructure/Site
6. Fundraising
7. General Finances
8. Marketing
9. Constituency



1. Infrastructure/Site
2. Increasing Costs
3. Staffing
4. Camper Numbers
5. Church Engagement
6. Culture/Society
7. General Finances
8. Fundraising & Donors
9. Judicatory/Denomination
10. Environment/Climate





# Camp/Retreat Center Directors

## About the Directors

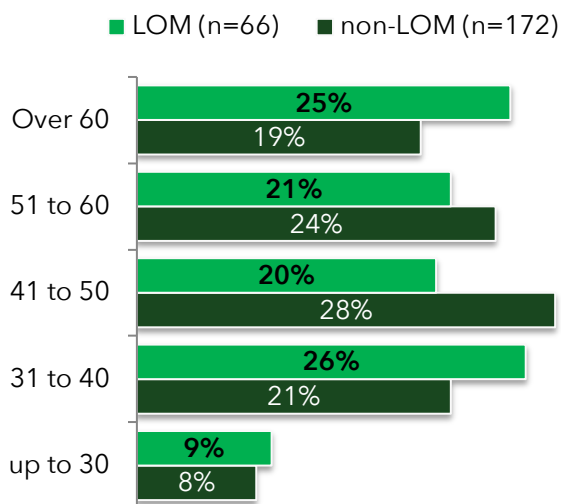
- 96% were white
- 47% were female
  - Among other OMC ministries, 38% of directors were female
  - The proportion of LOM directors that were female increased significantly since 2022 (33%)

## Education

- Education level: 3% did not have a bachelor's degree, 46% had a bachelor's degree, 50% had a master's degree, and 2% had a doctorate
- 39% had a formal theological degree (including 23% with an M.Div) and an additional 9% had a professional certification in religion, theology, or ministry
- 23% had received no formal theological education
- The remaining 33% had taken some courses or continuing education focused on religion or theology

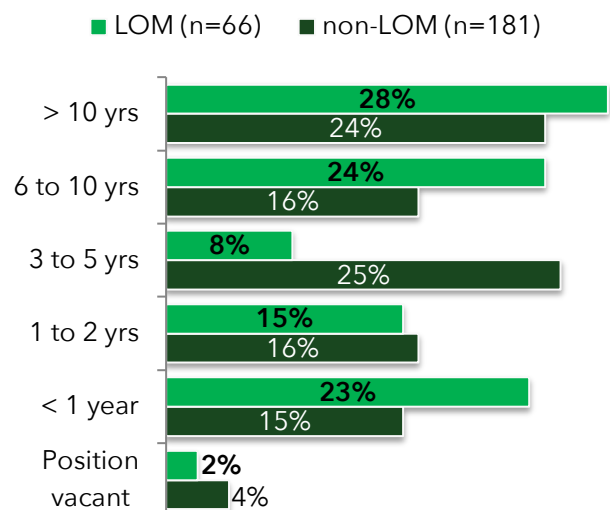
### Director Age

FIGURE 10A



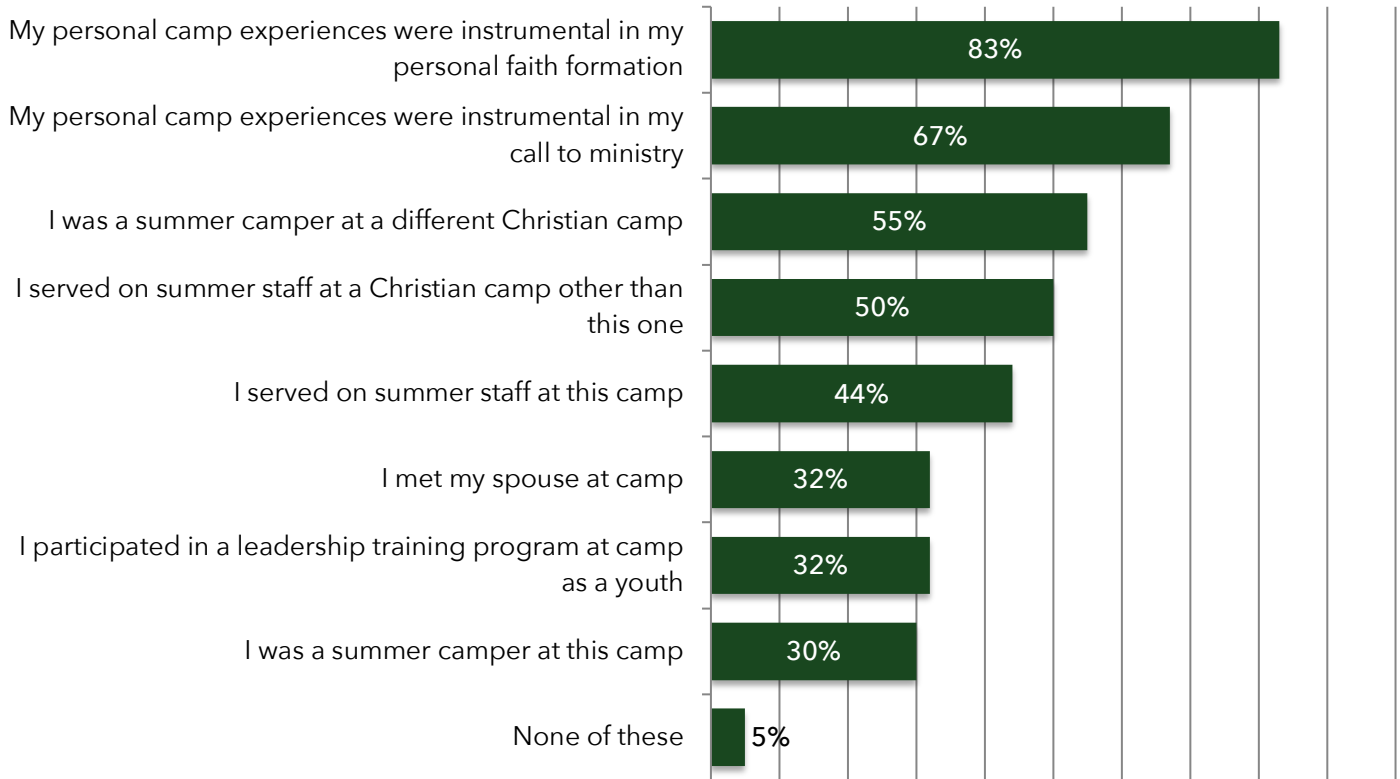
### Director Tenure

FIGURE 10B





## In which of the following ways has camp impacted your personal story? FIGURE 11A, n=66



- **74%** of respondents served on summer camp staff at either their current camp or another Christian camp
- **85%** attended summer camp, either at their current camp or another Christian camp
- Over two thirds of respondents (**67%**) indicated 4 or more of the above ways camp impacted them

## Respondent State of Being

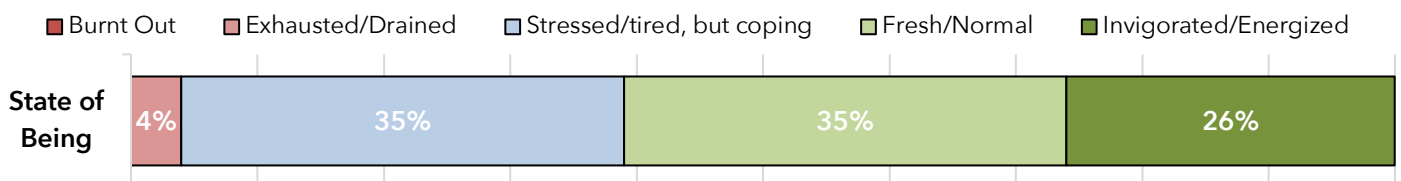


FIGURE 11B



# Summer Camp 2024

## Overall summer program summary

- 67% had primarily residential summer camp for children/youth (almost all of these were co-ed programs)
- 28% ran a combination of traditional overnight summer camp, day camps, and retreats or other programs
- 3% were primarily rental facilities for outside groups
- 2% were primarily retreat centers during the summer

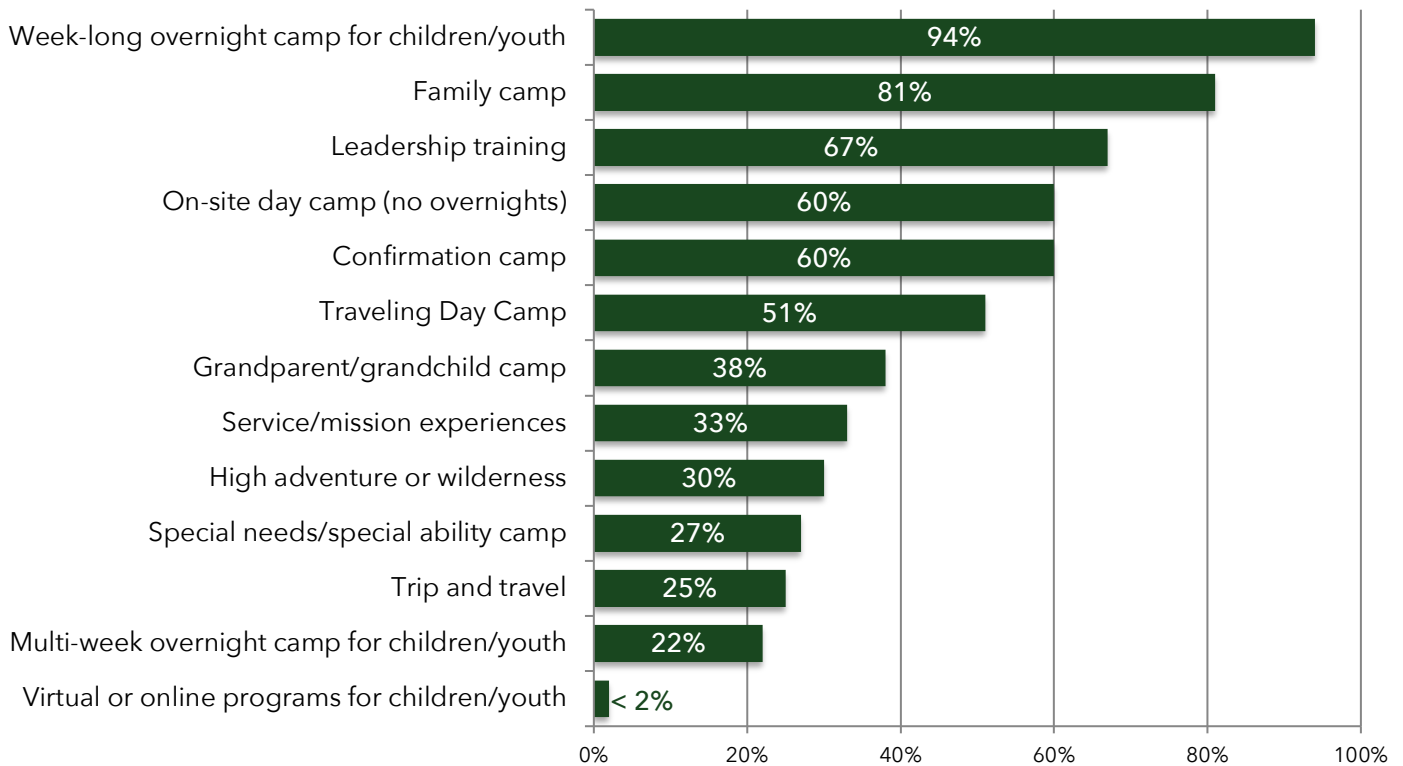
## Weeks of Summer Programming

For those that offered summer camp programming, the median number of weeks offered in 2024 (not including staff training) was 9, with over two thirds of ministry centers (68%) offering between 7 and 9 weeks of programming. About one quarter (23%) offered less than 7 weeks, with the remaining 9% of centers offering 10 weeks.

### Summer Ministry Sessions Offered

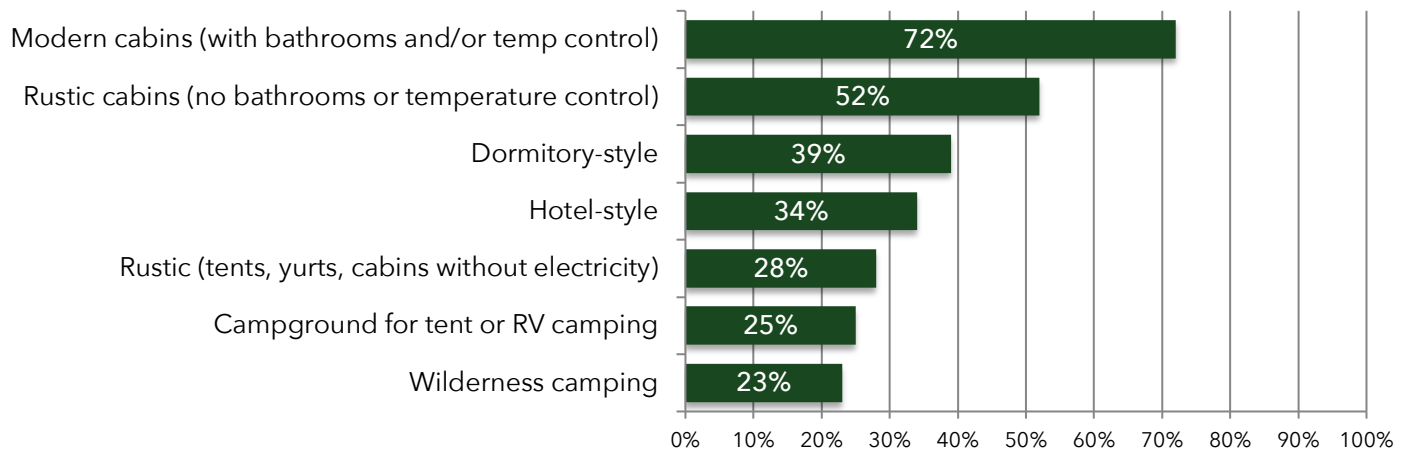
(of 64 centers offering summer camp programs)

FIGURE 12, n=66



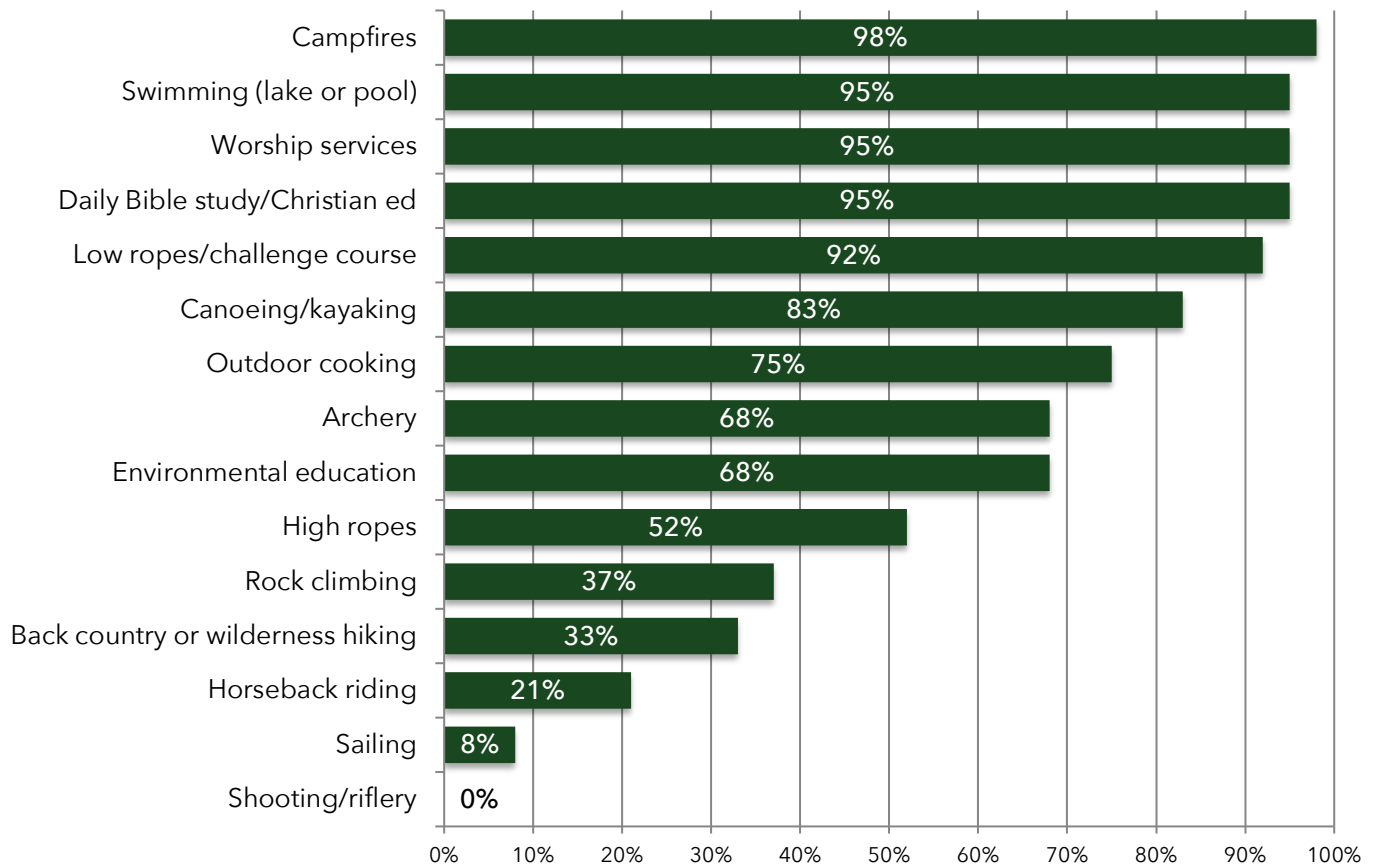
## Summer Housing Accommodations Available

FIGURE 13A, n=64



## Which of the following are regularly offered during summer programming?

FIGURE 13B, n=63



## Centralized and Decentralized Programming

Centralized programming was defined as having “daily large-group activities, individual participant choice, and large-group meals,” while decentralized programming was defined as having “activities by participant group, few all-camp activities, and meals in small groups.”

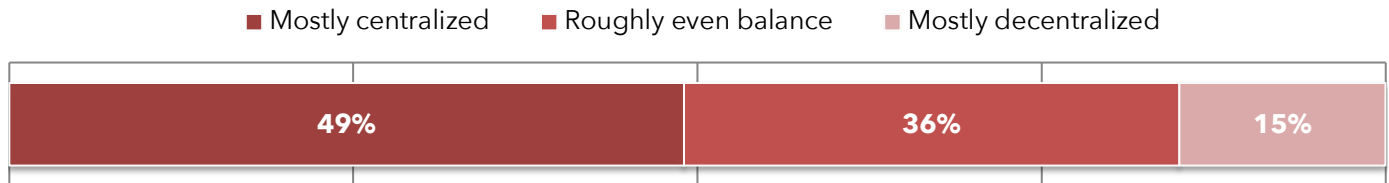
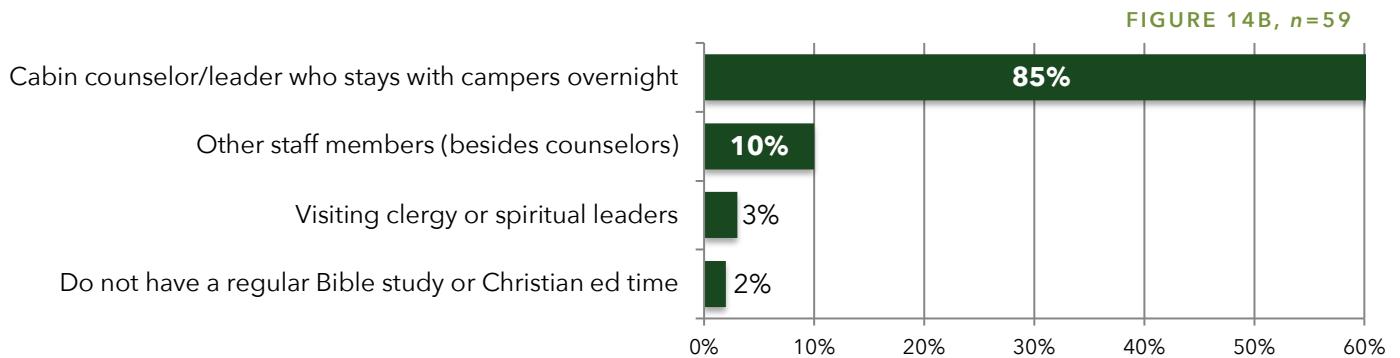
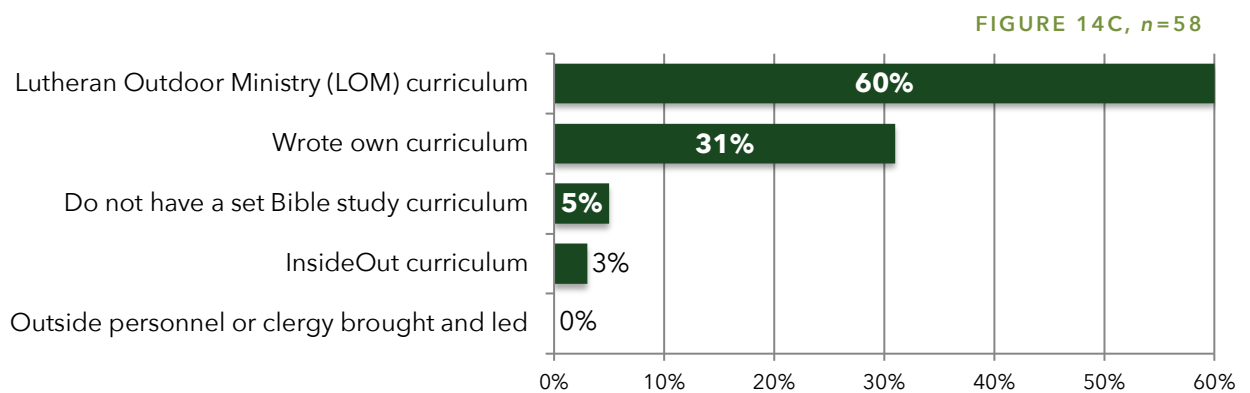


FIGURE 14A, n=59

## For the majority of your camp programs, who leads/facilitates the Bible study or Christian education time?



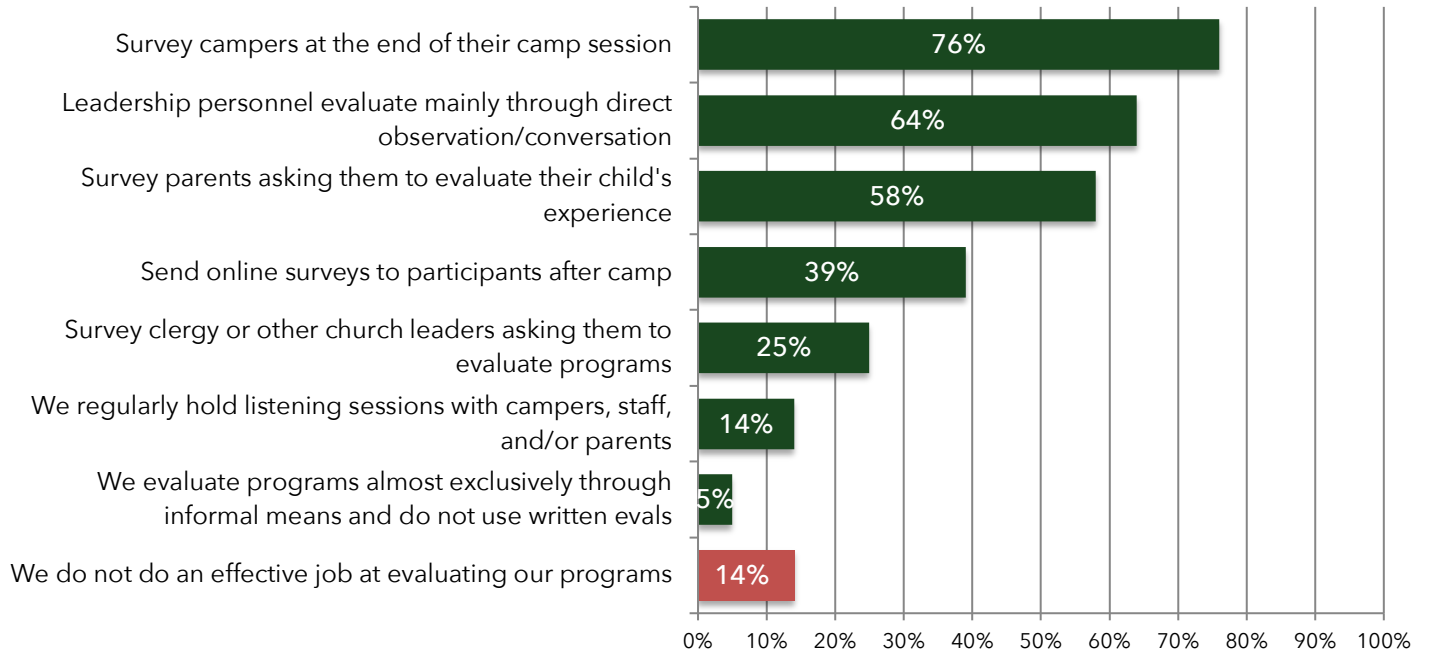
## What did your camp use for summer Bible study curriculum?





## Evaluation Methods Used in 2024

FIGURE 15, n=59





# Summer Camp Enrollment in 2024

## Summer Capacity

Summer camp capacity varied widely among the responding ministry centers. About a third of respondents had capacity for under 110 overnight guests at a time. Another third had capacity for 110-175 overnight guests. The top third had capacity for over 175 overnight guests at a time. Average capacity was 168, which was nearly identical to 2022 (164).

- Less than half (44%) of camps indicated their enrollment was at least 75% of capacity in 2024 (including only 15% saying enrollment was at 90% capacity or higher).
- Only 28% indicated that enrollment was higher than in 2023, with 38% reporting lower enrollment.
- For a third of camps (33%), enrollment was still down when considering the past 5 years.

## Summer Camp Enrollment Trends among LOM Sites

FIGURE 16

		2014	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024
Enrollment as % of capacity	90% capacity or higher	14%	16%	8%	5%	18%	<b>15%</b>
	75% to 89% capacity	42%	33%	31%	2%	21%	<b>29%</b>
	50% to 74% capacity	44%	44%	45%	7%	49%	<b>37%</b>
	Less than 50% capacity		7%	16%	86%	12%	<b>19%</b>
Enrollment compared with previous summer	Much higher than previous summer (> 10%)	41%	49%	26%	5%	34%	<b>9%</b>
	Somewhat higher (< 10% higher)					25%	<b>19%</b>
	About the same as last summer	28%	40%	38%	5%	24%	<b>34%</b>
	Somewhat lower (< 10% lower)	32%	11%	36%	90%	17%	<b>24%</b>
	Much lower than previous summer (> 10%)						<b>14%</b>
Enrollment compared with past 5 years	Highest of past 5 summers	-	22%	13%	1%	5%	<b>7%</b>
	Higher than most of past 5 summers	-	22%	24%	2%	15%	<b>24%</b>
	About the same as past 5 summers	-	34%	32%	5%	30%	<b>36%</b>
	Lower than most of past 5 summers	-	20%	23%	6%	38%	<b>20%</b>
	Lowest of past 5 summers	-	3%	8%	86%	12%	<b>13%</b>

# Overnight summer camp enrollment

Respondents were asked to provide enrollment numbers for both summer 2023 and summer 2024 for several programs they indicated offering. For overnight summer camp:

In 2023, 55 camps provided data

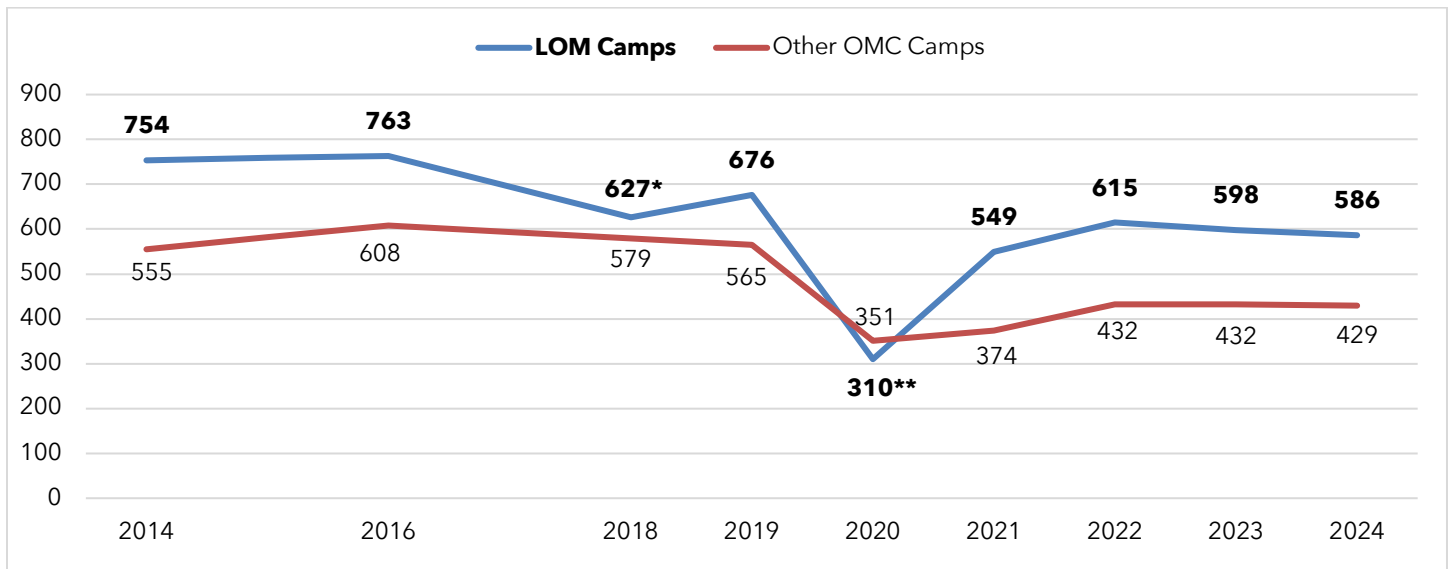
- Average overnight camper enrollment was **598**
- A quarter of camps enrolled fewer than 230 overnight campers, a quarter 230-510, a quarter 511-730, and a quarter more than 730 campers
- The top 10% enrolled more than 1000 campers
- Together, these camps served **32,917** overnight campers

In 2024, 54 camps provided data

- Average overnight camper enrollment was **586**
- A quarter of camps enrolled fewer than 240 overnight campers, a quarter 240-450, a quarter 451-700, and a quarter more than 700 campers
- The top 10% enrolled 1000 or more campers
- Together, they served **31,636** overnight campers

## Average Number of Overnight Summer Campers, 2014-2024

FIGURE 17



\*The drop in average summer camp numbers in 2018 is attributable almost entirely to a drop in Lutheran Outdoor Ministries camps during the year of the triennial ELCA Youth Gathering

\*\*88% of camps canceled their overnight camp programs in 2020. This number represents only those camps that offered overnight camp programs.

# Day Camp Enrollment

Over half (60%) of camps indicated that they operated on-site day camp programs.

In 2023, 31 of these camps operated day camp and provided enrollment data

- Average day camp enrollment was **195**
- Half of camps enrolled fewer than 75 day campers, a quarter 75-143, and a quarter more than 144 campers
- The top 10% enrolled 220 or more campers
- Together, these camps served **6,049** day campers

In 2024, 48 camps operated day camp and provided enrollment data

- Average day camp enrollment was **183**
- Half of camps enrolled 75 or fewer day campers, a quarter 76-150, and a quarter more than 150 campers
- The top 10% enrolled more than 200 campers
- Together, they served **6,040** day campers

# Family Camp Enrollment

Over three quarters of camps (81%) indicated that they operated family camp programs.

In 2023, 41 of these camps operated family camp and provided enrollment data

- Average family camp enrollment was **193** (this was slightly higher than in 2022, when the average was 168)
- Half of camps enrolled 85 or fewer family campers, a quarter 86-200, and a quarter over 200 participants
- Together, these camps served **7,926** family campers, with over two thirds (71%) served by the top 10%

In 2024, 42 camps operated family camp and provided enrollment data

- Average family camp enrollment was **192**
- Half of camps enrolled 83 or fewer family campers, a quarter 84-200, and a quarter over 200 participants
- Together, they served **8,046** family campers

# Leadership Training Programs

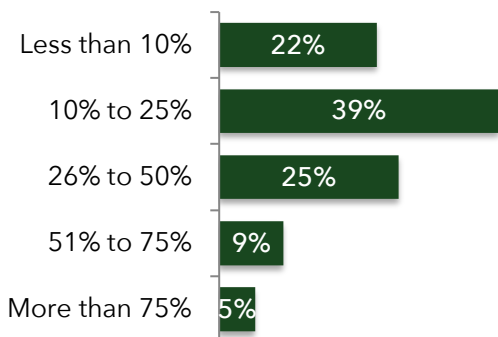
Over two thirds (67%) of camps indicated that they offered leadership training programs.

In 2024, 37 of these camps operated leadership training programs and provided enrollment data

- Average leadership training enrollment was **20** (slightly lower than 2022, when the average was 22)
- Half of all camps enrolled 10 or fewer participants in their program, a quarter 11-29, and the remaining quarter 30 or more participants

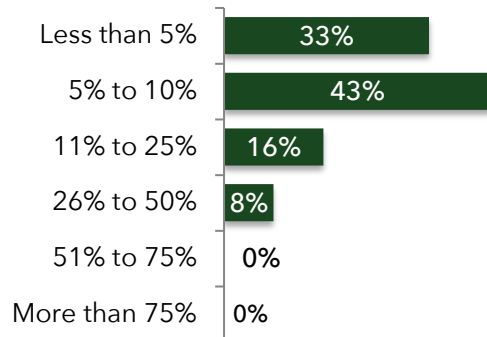
**% of Campers Receiving Financial Assistance**

FIGURE 18A, n=57



**% of Campers Representing Racial Minorities**

FIGURE 18B, n=51





# Summer Camp Fees

Average weekly camp fee in U.S. **\$546 USD**

- 25% of camps charged \$650 or more for their typical week-long overnight program. At the low end, a quarter of camps charged \$450 or less.

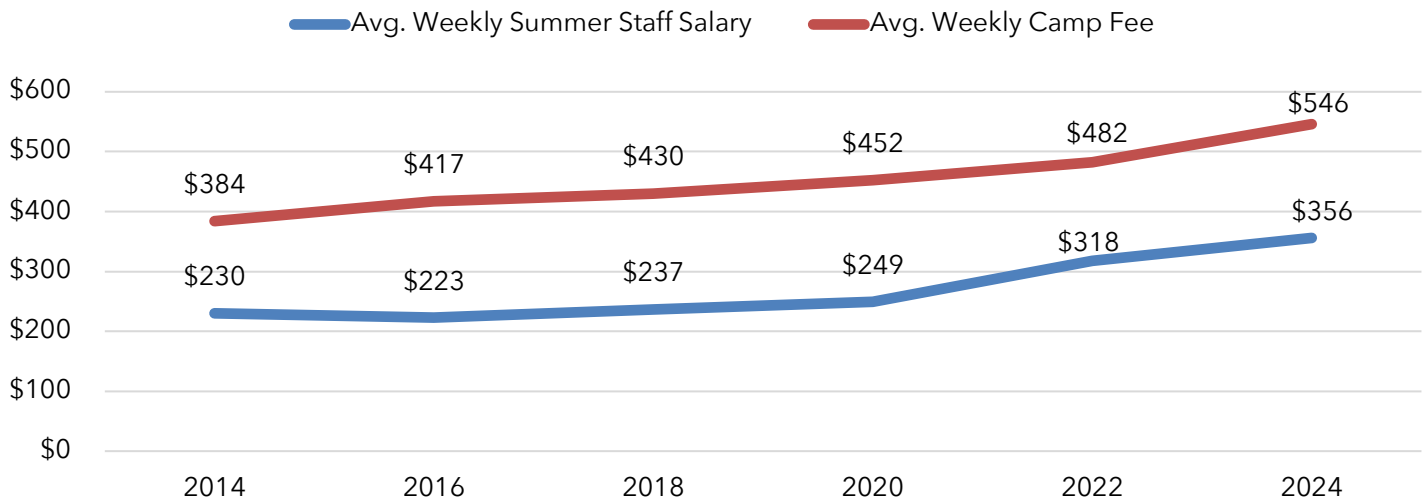
Average Weekly Camp Fee, by Geographic Region, 2024

FIGURE 19A

	Northeast	Midwest	South U.S.	West U.S.	All USA
<b>LOM Camps</b>	<b>\$599</b>	<b>\$526</b>	<b>\$528</b>	<b>\$554</b>	<b>\$546</b>
Other OMC Camps	\$560	\$516	\$613	\$506	\$556

LOM Summer Staff Weekly Salary and Weekly Camper Fee Trends 2014-2024

FIGURE 19B





# Summer Camp Staff

Average weekly summer staff salary **\$356 USD**

- A third of LOM camps paid summer staff \$400 or more per week. At the low end, a third paid \$300 or less per week. The middle third paid between \$301 and \$399 per week. The top 10% paid \$425 or more per week.
- In addition to salary, common benefits were room and board (100%), bonus for returning staff (74%), bonus for special certifications (53%), and bonus for recruiting another staff member (45%)

Average Weekly Summer Staff Salary by Geographic Region, 2024

FIGURE 20A

	Northeast	Midwest	South U.S.	West U.S.	All U.S.
<b>LOM Camps</b>	<b>\$305</b>	<b>\$372</b>	<b>\$321</b>	<b>\$388</b>	<b>\$356</b>
Other OMC Camps	\$347	\$353	\$302	\$413	\$345

FIGURE 20B: Staffing Structure

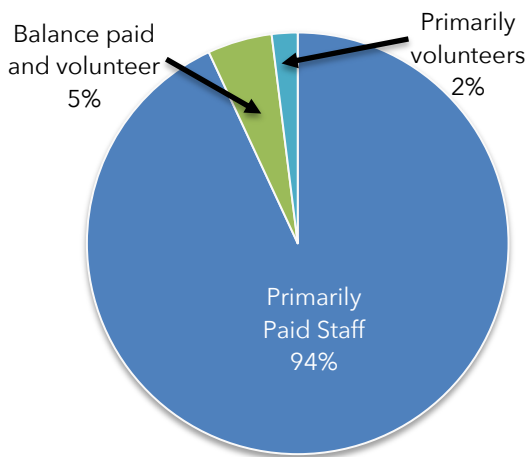
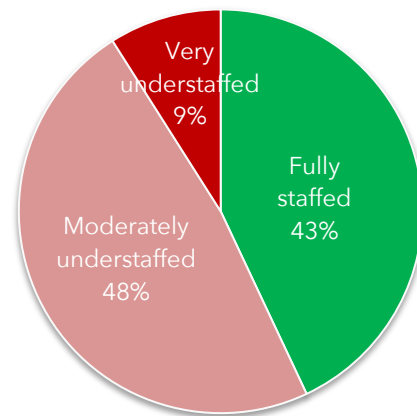


FIGURE 20C: Staffing Level



% of Summer Staff Returning from previous summers

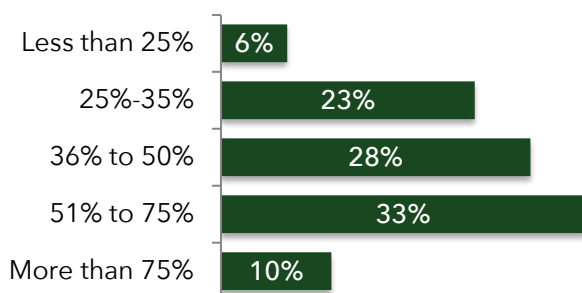


FIGURE 20D, n=61

% of Summer Staff Representing Racial Minorities

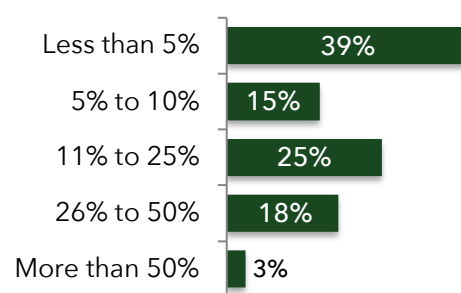


FIGURE 20E, n=61



# Retreats and Conferences

## Primary clientele for retreats/conferences

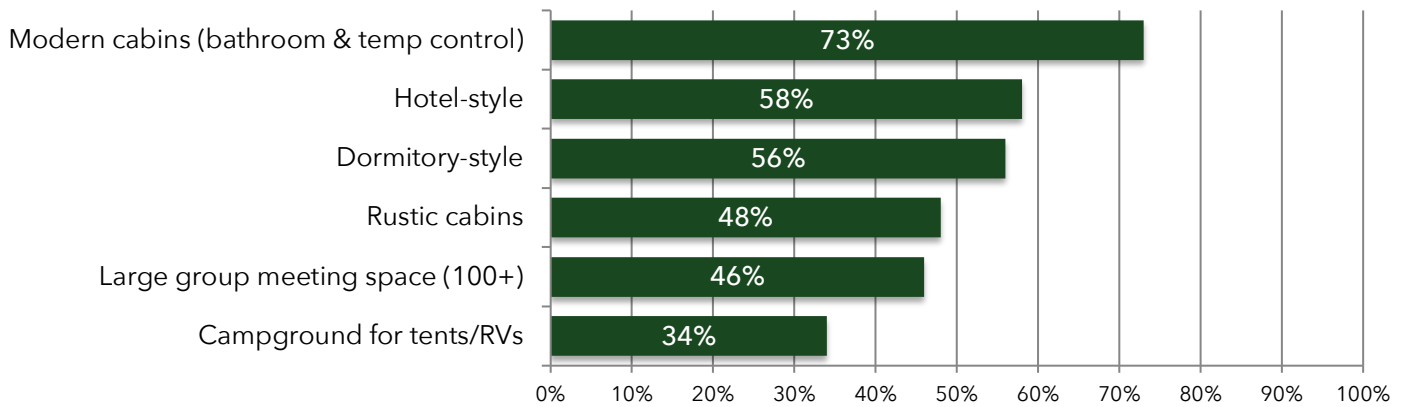
- 73% Mix of children, youth, adults, and families
- 25% Primarily **adults**
- 2% Primarily **youth/children**

## Retreat/Conference Ministry Summary

- 20% Primarily or exclusively user groups and facility rental
- 58% Majority user groups/facility rental with some programmed/hosted retreats
- 17% Balance of user group/facility rental and programmed/hosted retreats

## Retreat Accommodations Offered

FIGURE 21A, n=59



## Seasonal Retreat Staff, Fall 2024

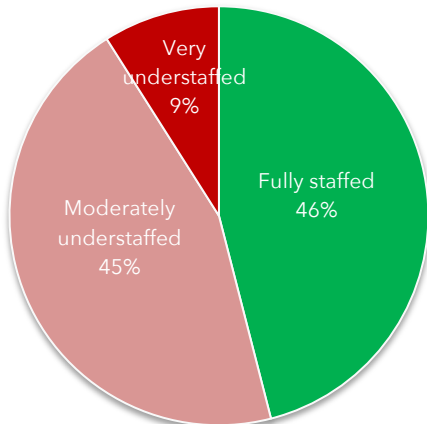


FIGURE 21B, n=56

## Percentage of Retreat/Conference Guests Affiliated with Constituent Denomination(s)

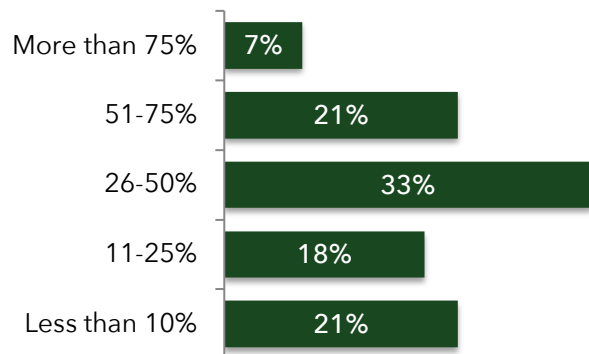
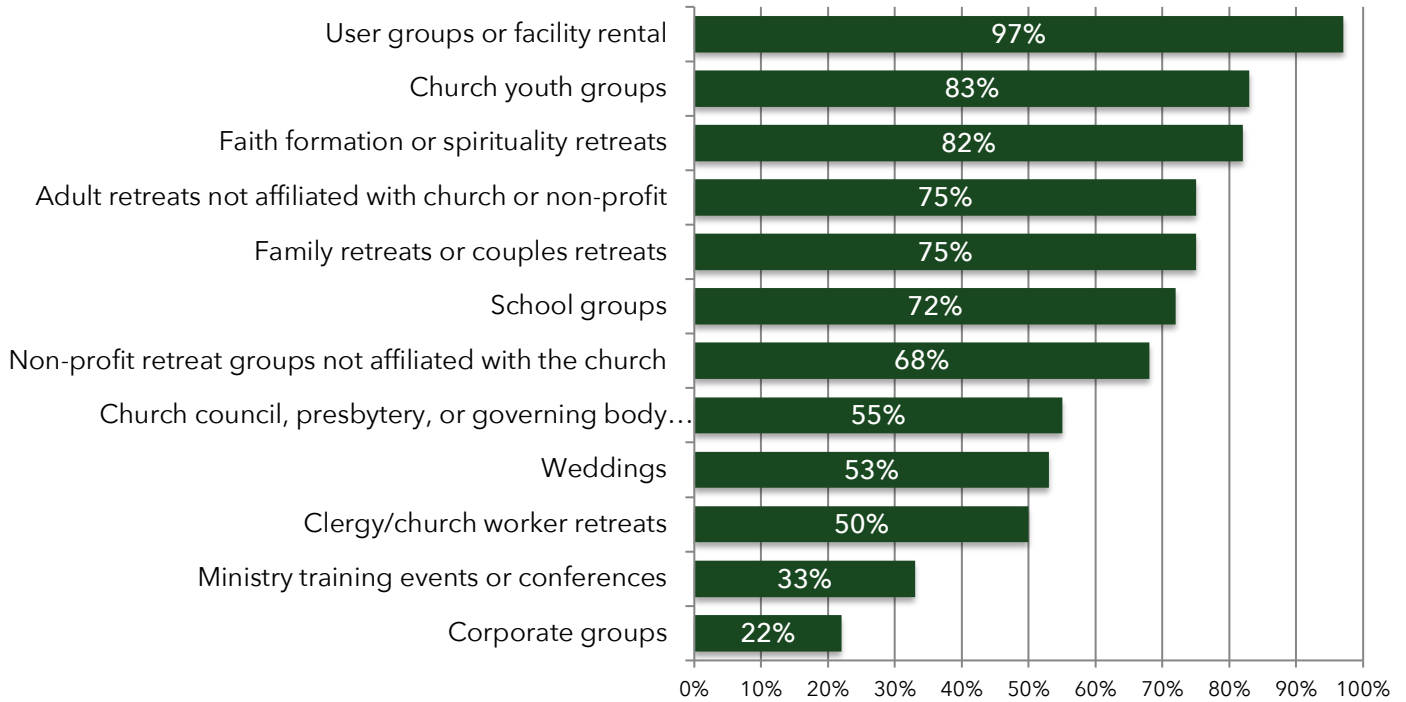


FIGURE 21C, n=57

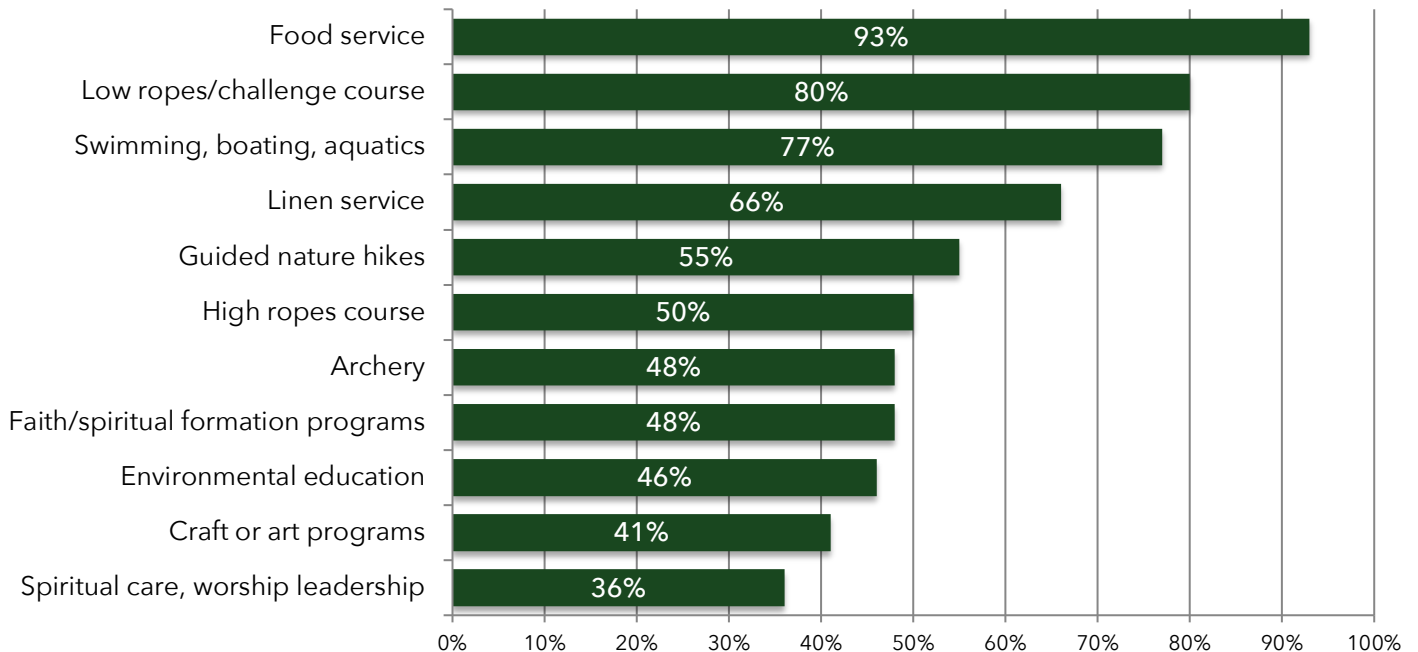
## Retreat/Conference Center Programs Offered on a Regular Basis

FIGURE 22A, n=60



## % Retreat Centers Offering Selected Retreat Amenities and Programs

FIGURE 22B, n=56





## Overnight capacity for retreats/conferences

OUT OF 60 MINISTRY CENTERS

A quarter of ministry centers indicated that their overnight retreat capacity was fewer than 85 guests. Another quarter reported a capacity between 86 and 155 guests. Another quarter could accommodate between 155 and 213. The remaining quarter could accommodate 214 or more guests overnight. Average overnight capacity was 166 guests, about the same as the average from the 2022 survey (163).

### LOM Retreat/Conference Center Usage Trends

FIGURE 23

	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024
90% capacity or higher on weekends	4%	6%	1%	9%	<b>16%</b>
75% to 89% capacity on weekends	16%	30%	2%	24%	<b>26%</b>
50% to 74% capacity on weekends	37%	30%	5%	35%	<b>27%</b>
Less than 50% capacity on weekends	43%	33%	92%	32%	<b>31%</b>
Much HIGHER than previous year (> 10%)	46%	9%	2%	33%	<b>10%</b>
Somewhat higher than previous year (< 10%)		38%	3%	40%	<b>46%</b>
About the same as previous year	37%	35%	3%	25%	<b>33%</b>
Somewhat lower than previous year (< 10%)	17%	13%	5%	2%	<b>9%</b>
Much LOWER than previous year (> 10%)		5%	87%	0%	<b>2%</b>
Highest of past 5 years	17%	13%	1%	10%	<b>22%</b>
Higher than most of past 5 years	28%	36%	5%	25%	<b>39%</b>
About the same as past 5 years	40%	38%	2%	30%	<b>32%</b>
Lower than most of past 5 years	15%	12%	1%	35%	<b>5%</b>
Lowest of past 5 years	0%	1%	91%	0%	<b>2%</b>



## Retreat Pricing

### Average base cost for single overnight in hotel-style accommodations: **\$82 USD**

- **Hotel-style** was defined as single/double rooms with private bathrooms and linens
- 58% of retreat/conference centers offered this type of accommodation (34 provided cost)
- When there was a difference between single and double occupancy rates, the single occupancy rate was used for the calculation
- Some ministry centers listed only a per building rental fee, and these were not included in the calculation unless they provided a maximum number of occupants
- A quarter of retreat/conference centers charged less than \$55 for a single overnight in hotel-style accommodations, a quarter charged \$56-\$75, a quarter \$76-100, and the last quarter over \$100 per night

### Average base cost for overnight in retreat-style accommodations: **\$64 USD**

- **Retreat-style** was defined as semi-private or shared bath and multiple people per room (these included a variety of housing options, from dormitory style to multi-occupancy cabins)
- The cost was calculated to represent the per-person overnight charge. In some cases, individuals were given discounts for multiple nights or off-peak nights. These discounts are not considered in the above average.
- Some indicated that meals were included in the overnight fee. In these cases, meal costs were subtracted from the overnight fee to represent the cost of just the overnight, with meals accounted separately.
- A quarter charged less than \$34 for a single overnight in retreat-style accommodations, a quarter charged \$34-\$50, a quarter \$51-\$80, and the highest quarter charged \$81 or more per night

### Average meal costs:

93% of responding conference/retreat centers offered meal service to guests. While some incorporated the cost into the overnight fees, most of these also had a per meal rate. The majority of centers indicated that they charged separately for meals and lodging.

- Average breakfast cost: **\$10.58**
- Average lunch cost: **\$12.30**
- Average dinner cost: **\$14.74**

### Average Meal Costs, by Annual Budget Category

**FIGURE 24**

	< \$200k	\$200k - \$500k	\$501k - \$1 Million	> \$1 Million	All Sites
Average breakfast cost	\$11.00	\$10.50	\$10.28	\$10.92	<b>\$10.58</b>
Average lunch cost	\$12.00	\$11.17	\$12.17	\$12.30	<b>\$12.30</b>
Average dinner cost	\$13.00	\$12.83	\$14.41	\$15.97	<b>\$14.74</b>



## Outdoor Education Programs

**32%** of ministry centers indicated that they operate an outdoor school or outdoor education program other than those incorporated into regular summer camp programming

- None of the ministry centers indicated that the outdoor school was a separate 501(c)(3)

### Staffing

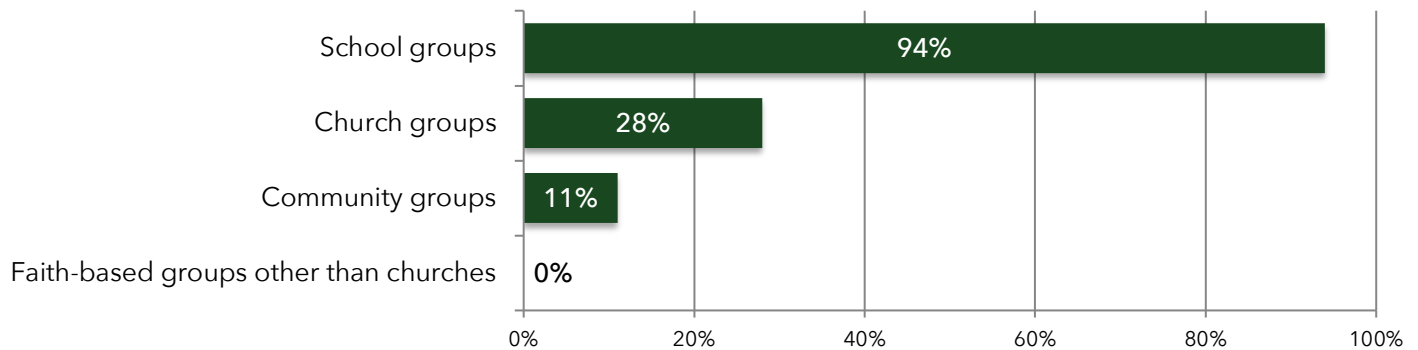
- A little over a quarter (29%) of outdoor schools did not employ any year-round staff, about half (47%) employed 1 staff member, and the remaining quarter employed 2 or more staff people (10% employed 8)
- Seasonal staff were a little more common. A third of outdoor schools did not employ any seasonal staff, a third employed 1-2, and the remaining third employed 3 or more seasonal staff, with the top 10% of camps employing 10-16 people.

### Rates

Rates for these programs varied widely, since some were overnight programs and others were single day programs. Individual ministry centers also indicated that prices varied widely from group to group, based on the needs of each group. The day rates were as low as \$5-15 per student and others were over \$90 per student.

## Primary Clientele of Outdoor Education Programs

FIGURE 25, n=18



## Garden Programs

Almost a third (31%) of LOM ministry centers indicated having a garden program or farm that they use to provide food for meals on site.

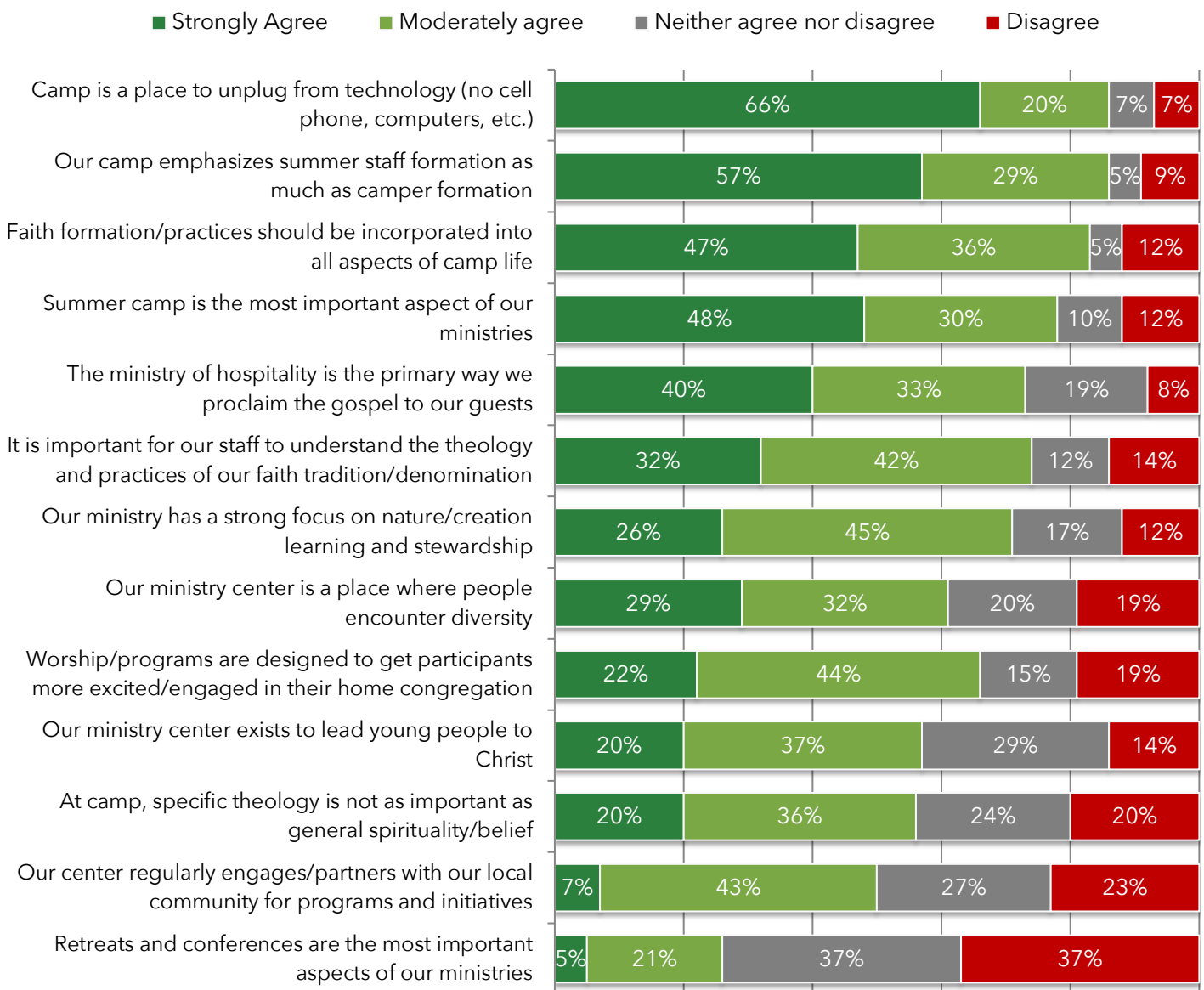
- About a third of these (11% of all centers) said that they regularly use food from the garden or farm in their meals
- The remaining two-thirds (20% of all centers) said they use the food only occasionally or for special programs



# Ministry Center Philosophy

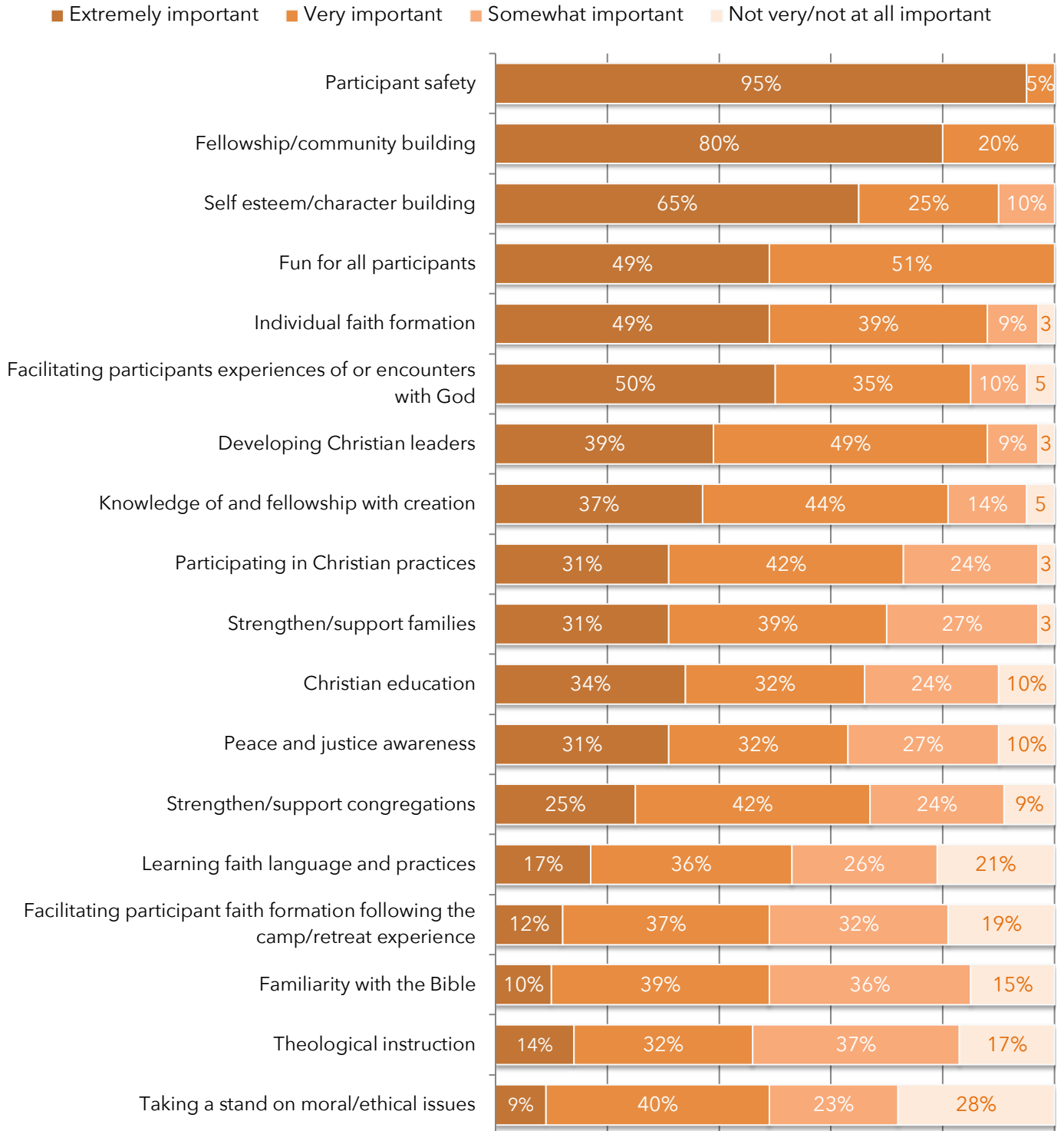
## Level of Agreement with Philosophy Statements about Ministry Site *Items listed in order of average agreement score*

**FIGURE 26, n=59**



## Level of Importance Assigned to Selected Program Priorities *listed in order of average importance score*

**FIGURE 27, n=59**





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