

Outline for Living Into the Possibilities

Outline:

1. Welcome, thanks, prayer, topic
2. Opening caveats
3. Setting the stage: RTALC's organizational context
 - alignment across ministry
 - leadership alignment
 - donor engagement and giving
 - flexibility and adaptability of the org
 - missional clarity and strategic vision
 - financial health and increasing attendance
 - abundance model
 - leadership model for ministry includes summer staff
 - our call to be church now
4. Our approach to summer 2020- options and cautions
5. Leadership in these times- Duchene
6. Thanks, Q & A

I'd like to open our time together with prayer.

God, our world is wrestling with a pandemic that is impacting every aspect of daily life. Things are very different than we are used to and all of our ministries have been affected. We are feeling all kinds of emotions: we're scared, nervous, anxious, and searching for the right paths for our own organization. Please guide us in this conversation today and open our hearts to see the possibilities for our ministries this summer. May we continue to be your hands and feet as we serve through our outdoor ministries. AMEN

Opening Comments (Caveats):

I want start by laying out our time together. I am excited to share our approach with you. However, the first 15 minutes or so I will be sharing the “why’s” to how we can even consider this approach. I promise, we will get to the plan.

- We all know this has been a very challenging last month. Rainbow Trail was asked to share our story of our approach to this summer. This is our context. After seeing what has been happening in LOM over the last week, I believe many of you think we are crazy for following this plan. I invite you to listen and begin to understand the “why” of our context, process and goals.

- These two days are camps sharing their process and decisions. It is not one is right and one is wrong. And we are not defending our thesis. This is just our choice of direction.
 - Each camp will benefit greatly by understanding your own context. Every camp needs to understand their situation – financial, staff-wise, support-wise. Don't just do something because someone else is doing it. Everyone's circumstances are different.
 - We are clear that this plan is not for everyone; we believe every single camp's situation is unique and different. There is no cookie cutter answer for all camps.
 - I need to say this twice: **Full-time staff, Camper and summer staff safety is number one to all of us; this is not a plan that endangers people at any level; in fact, it does just the opposite.**
 - I had full support and backing from the Board from the very beginning as the plan was being conceived and put into place, not just agreement after I'd come up with this 'stance'
 - **We know this will not be easy.** We know we might hit some financial challenges. These are not good enough reasons for us not to move forward.
 - And a comment I want to share from one of my board members: *I believe it is important to frame the "why" at the very beginning of the presentation. Why is it so important that we move forward? The faith community we service...kids, young adults, families and friends need us now perhaps more than ever. The health care workers, the essential workers, their families need us now just as much as they will need us after this pandemic is over.*
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Setting the Stage: RTALC's Organizational Context

The biggest part of us to take a stance of "Living into the Possibilities" is our organizational context. So, I am going to spend quite a bit of time setting the stage.

Context for Rainbow Trail Summer Strategy 2020

Open here with two Stories-

Story of 25 years ago that I realized that my ministry was to the summer staff rather than just to campers. Paradigm shift. If I served staff well, then they served campers even better.

Share the story about the alumni gathering we had where they expressed excitement about being endowed with the RTALC DNA and yet disappointed/angry that they were not "deployed for ministry" where they were in their local context. That surprised you, challenged you and shaped the boards conversation about RTALC's mission and vision being bigger than camp.

Why we are ready:

Leadership

- **Shared Vision** -Newly developed Vision and Strategic Plan two years in the making
- **Alignment of Leadership System:** Board, FT Directors, Summer Staff, Volunteers
- **Mission focus** of equipping summer staff for leadership, waterfall effect to develop leaders in summer campers
- **Trained Summer Staff-** Staff is 100% hired and began staff training in late March online; in our 4th week now
- **Shared Culture** - Board has been through our spring online staff training for alignment
- **New FT Directors** – one of our strongest assets: they ALL bring Innovation, energy, ideas, and digital natives
- **Executive Director that brings** 31 years of experience in outdoor ministries and a financial background with an MBA.
- **Growing camp use-** more and earlier registrations for summer camp, rapidly growing year-round retreat ministry has created momentum for RTALC; we were at 87% filled on March 10th before the pandemic hit
- **Strong congregational ambassadors and alumni** who carry message and DNA of RTALC and want to be deployed

Donor Relationships

- **Rally-** excitement about Land Exchange, BC remodel, new FT staff, donors are engaged and generous
- **Engaged-** Vision work engaged MANY alumni, families, donors, campers, and even congregations that are not tightly tied to RTALC to bring them in the fold
- **Growing donations-** donors excited by current land exchange process, current renovation of retreat center and innovative programming (camp for homeless children) have donors giving more
- **Donors are informed.** I have called over 60 donors in the last three weeks to check in that they are safe and healthy, and that they are ok. That's the only reason for the call. Donors lead the conversation to "what are doing with summer?" and open the door for me to talk about the "why's" of keeping our summer staff. Donors have offered to pay for summer staff for 2020 because they have been informed and believe in this strategy.
- **Staff Alumni** are willing to invest in current staff - paying for summer staff materials to help if staff is deployed; and staff mugs!
- The Board and I set a policy 20 years ago that we won't build until we have the funds for that project were in hand. Our donors know that too. Because of that, we are **100% debt free**

Flexibility/Adaptability of RTALC

- **Deploy-** We have been evacuated from our camp because of forest fires multiple times. We have run camp out of a middle school twice and on some else's site for over 7 weeks.

Our camp staff, campers and summer staff have learned how to be flexible and can move camp in hours and still retain program

- **Land Exchange** has required all RTALC supporters (staff, alumni, ambassadors, campers, congregations) to wrestle with the value of place and how to be camp without the site
- **Week 10 Innovations** with various populations because the schools starting earlier every year: children of incarcerated parents, camp grandparents, serving youth who are homeless from Grand Junction, etc.

Organizational Clarity

If there is such a thing as perfect timing in these situations, this is it. Rainbow Trail spent 2 years interviewing campers, doing focus groups, and wrestling as a Board to develop a new mission and vision statement that truly reflects who we are. This has given us Missional Clarity and Strategic Vision: RTALC's missional identity is clear. We know our "why" of ministry so that gives us freedom to innovate how and what we do for ministry to achieve our mission.

A big part of our DNA is that serve both campers and summer staff. So, we believe we still have an opportunity to have an impact on those summer staff we hired. This was a huge paradigm shift for me as a director probably 26 years ago. By focusing on the growth of staff and being involved in their lives, our campers actually had even better experiences. That is who we are.

Our Vision and Mission

Vision

Our vision is to Bridge camp to intentional life with Jesus for everyone who experiences the ministry of RTALC

Mission

RTALC creates holy spaces that embody God's RADICAL grace to affirm, empower and transform all people to be Christ's light in the world. The staff and board worked hard to describe those holy spaces are relational and experiential vessels or spaces that allow the work to happen. The spaces are not always the camp location itself. We looked at the conditions under which faith is formed, leadership is developed, children feel safe and loved and challenged when they are ready. These are the spaces of which we speak and can be formed anywhere.

Values

We value and are intentional about:

- Holy spaces where God is at work
- Genuinely living God's profound grace and love
- Authentic, safe and quality relationships and experiences
- Radical and abundant hospitality
- All people being empowered to claim and live out their unique gifts

Additional Conditions that allow us to follow this path:

- Because we serve both campers and summer staff, we feel a commitment to those that we hired and held out for us instead of pursuing other jobs earlier.
 - We have applied for a **PPP loan** which, if received, would keep us in the black through our “start in July” scenario 2.
 - We have a **fully engaged board that has been involved deeply in all of the forecasting and decisions.**
 - We have **enough restricted funds** that, if we had to, we could ask donors to allow us to borrow from ourselves to cover our losses, even in our “no summer” scenario; so no additional loan would be needed.
 - We have developed a **budgeting tool** over the last 25 years that allows us to make detailed “what if” scenarios so we can accurately reduce income, and we know exactly what we are eliminating expense-wise from the budget.
 - Our organization is operating out of an **abundance model** - that we have a lot to offer now, we have a real chance to be the church for people in the middle of this crisis, we believe our donors will join with us to help make up the difference, and this is not the time to sit idle.
 - The health care workers, the essential workers, their families need us now just as much as they will need after this pandemic.
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So, our conversation among Board and full time staff:

What’s at stake? What’s the worst thing that could happen to our organization? What’s the best thing that could happen?

After sharing RTLIC’s unique context that helped us make the decision, **we asked ourselves what or who is at stake here and what’s the worst thing that could happen.** We felt like this was one of those moments when we are called to be church, as imperfect and messy as it can sometimes be. **The point is to show up.**

Our Approach:

Our Strategy and Outcomes

Nothing this says we need to do what we are going to do on our site. So, our strategies and outcomes for this summer include:

- Building relationships (both campers and staff)
- Sharing acts of Service and Equipping those we serve to do the same
- People will experience the 5 Re’s (recreate, renew, reconnect, retreat, relationships)
- Strong Leadership Development for both summer staff and campers
- Providing Outreach/Connect people to Camp in a myriad of ways

- Donors want this and are committed to making it happen. Staff is too. The question isn't "can we do camp this summer?" The question is how can we bring the impact of camp to the world that so desperately needs it this summer?" If donors and staff are up for it, we should try. It will look different.
- Paul Hill sent out a "thinking piece" on Saturday that had two polar positions – "shut it all Down" and "Run Camp This Summer (even if it is later)". We don't believe that it is an either/or but rather a both/and situation with multiple possibilities along the continuum.
- **One point I want to emphasize one more time: it has been implied that if we are not shutting down for the summer, that we are being reckless and jeopardizing the health and safety of our staff, campers, and all involved in our program. This is not a "damn the torpedoes" approach and that we just going in with guns a blazing, disregarding what our health officials, and state and federal authorities are telling us. Full-time staff, Camper and summer staff safety is number one to all of us; this is not a plan that endangers people at any level; in fact, it does just the opposite.**
- There is an incredible amount of planning involved. We know that. Thank you for our young, energetic full-time staff!!! The reality is that 95% of all the options we are exploring have **no one** on our site and doesn't have our summer staff gathering in person together at all.
- What we are saying is that we have an opportunity to be the church when people really need it – now AND after the pandemic.
- We are currently doing a joint project with Sky Ranch and the Rocky Mountain Synod, called *Rainbow in the Sky* and it is a half hour every Monday to Thursday on our Synod's Facebook page. We've done about 4 weeks of it now. It is devotion style with music, scripture, a reflection, and prayer. It's not a big deal really, but we are getting anywhere from 1000 to close to 4000 views of these every day. **People are hungry for camp – in any form.** This is driving us to do more.
- Rather than pick a date to say "go or no go," we have created multiple budget scenarios that go from a "full summer as normal" to a complete "no summer camp as we know it" scenario and everything in between.
- As we move through time and act based on the guidelines set by our government and health officials, we are able to step into a plan, and **are prepared to move to the next scenario when conditions say that is where we are moving.** This allows us to be nimble in our planning and responsive to the current conditions.
- In all of those scenarios, we have kept our full-time time staff and we have kept our summer staff employed. **That was a Board priority.** There is a \$42,000 reduction in the Executive Director's Salary and benefits in the later scenarios.

The Scenarios

- **Scenario 1** is summer as normal – we do not believe that scenario will happen now.
- **Scenario 2** would be a delayed start based on July 1st with staff training being started online and completed on-site if health and government officials agree we can open. Some of the options I have described below would/could take place. We feel the decision point for Scenario 3 will be, at the latest, early June. We have already been talking to BP groups about moving later in the summer, just in case. We have a plan and are ready to try and move our intro campers to week 8 from week 2 to not lose that income.
- **Scenario 3** would start at the beginning of August. Still 2 weeks of camp possible on-site if health and government officials say yes. Until then, some of the options I have described below would/could take place. We feel the decision point for Scenario 3 will be in June.
- **Scenario 4** is no camp on site at all. We believe we will know if we are going to be in this scenario in mid- June at the latest. At that point, we move in a whole new direction.

Some example options for Scenarios 2-4:

We are looking at multiple possibilities for how we might continue to “do camp” and impact the lives of people. A few ideas in the works right now:

1. Create a camp format where we have staff work virtually with the campers that were supposed to come each week. We assign two counselors to each “cabin,” we do daily morning worship with staff faith stories shared every day on our Facebook page, staff will lead Bible study by cabin during the day, staff will do check-ins with campers individually each day, and then evening worship on line again. Free to campers.
 2. Potential online day camp – we have 35 day camps scheduled for this summer. Create a tool that will allow that ministry to happen for congregations. Congregations are craving this right now.
 3. We are exploring deploying our summer staff for volunteer efforts on behalf of Rainbow Trail in their own home towns. Once we know this, we will give summer staff the option to opt out of their summer if they so choose. If they want to engage in this shared ministry with us, then there will be a new job description that includes:
 - Part of their job will be to find a volunteer position that they can do every day during the week days. For example, we are talking to health care professionals about how we might provide nannies/child care workers for health care workers at no charge. This is a critical need. We want this to be safe for all involved. They are excited about working through the possibilities, using health care workers as part of our consulting team.
 - We will start each day with a zoom staff meeting, devotions, and prayer together. We will provide RTALC staff shirts for them to wear to work, their wooden nametag, directors will still do on-on-one conversations with each of their “team” each week, and they will still receive their staff mug for the summer at the end of the season
 4. A hybrid of several of these.
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Closing

As I reflect on my 31 years in outdoor ministry, I think about the mentors I had in outdoor ministry that worked with me and shaped me. It wasn't always easy, but they embraced the challenges in front of them, thought deeply and carefully planned, and then helped lead the church through those times. These were my teachers.

There is from data that has just been collected and gathered by Sacred Playgrounds and TicTac Toe Marketing that will help all of us gain a better understanding of what people want.

Every camp has their context and needs to do what is right for their organization.

Our organization feels outdoor ministry has a chance to lead the church this summer THROUGH what is happening (which is one of the strong traits of outdoor ministry), as well as after the pandemic is over.

Mary Kay Duchene shared some insights on what those who rely on our leadership need from us as leaders –

- Trust the organization
- Feel compassion
- Experience stability
- Know that there is hope

Another nugget of wisdom that Mary Kay gifted to us, as we acknowledge the fear that we all have about an uncertain future, “if we don't do anything different from the normal, the changes that are sweeping over us might leave us with nothing at all”.

And finally, quote from our ELCA Bishop Eaton from her COVID-19 appeal message:

“I am proud to say that even during challenging times, we continue our service in living out the mission of this church: *Together in Jesus Christ we are freed by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly and serve joyfully.*”

Thanks for allowing me to share our story with you today!

Questions?