

# The Ministry of Retreat

Although Jesus never commanded us to use retreats as a ministry tool, he clearly taught it by His example. Jesus retreated for his own benefit according to Luke 5:15-16. As more and more people followed Him, some to hear His teaching and some for a healing handout, the Bible tells us that Jesus made it a regular practice to withdraw to lonely places to pray. Jesus repeated this practice with His disciples telling them to “come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” as we see in Mark 6:30-32. For Jesus, though it was more than just about rest. When He wanted to work through a specific purpose with His disciples, He would take them away, often to the mountains. We see this in Mark 9:2-8 for His Transfiguration. Luke 22:39-40 tells us that these kinds of trips were a part of their “usual” routine. For Jesus a retreat was an effective ministry tool.

At Streamside, it is our privilege to host many groups who have made the ministry of retreat a strategic part of their usual routine. Some are led by youth group leaders who desire to bring teens and their friends to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Others are led by pastors seeking for men or women in their church to come away from distractions and refocus on what is really important. A few are comprehensive strategies beginning a period of intense discipleship with a retreat called an encounter and then returning at the end for a celebration in which the equipped disciples are sent out in ministry. Each of these groups understands the effectiveness of the ministry of retreat and has chosen Streamside as their location. If you are not already utilizing the ministry tool of retreat, we encourage you to do so.

Christian camping might be the most effective tool for reaching children, teens and adults with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Try this research exercise sometime. Next time you are in a room with 10 or more people who claim the name of Christ, ask... “how many of you either accepted the Lord or made some other kind of significant spiritual commitment in a camp or retreat setting?” You might be surprised at what you find. Chances are one or more will reply to the affirmative. According to a Waypoint Research Survey done in 2009 the following staggering statistics were discovered by polling camps who were members of the Christian Camp & Conference Association ([www.ccca.org](http://www.ccca.org))...

**\*In 2008 alone, 246,000 individuals trusted Christ in a camp or retreat setting. That includes 22,000 adults, 99,000 teens and 128,000 children!**

**\*In addition, there were 412,000 pastors, Christian workers and missionaries currently serving as a result of a decision made at a Christian camp!**

This does not surprise us at Streamside. We saw 34 significant spiritual decisions in our summer camping program for urban youth and recently six teens from a retreat group accepted Christ as Savior.

Why is Christian camping so effective? Here, briefly, are the major factors I believe that make the value of Christian camping so amazing.

- 1. The Change Factor:** When a person leaves his normal routine of life, he is more open to consideration of spiritual things. The mind becomes uncluttered with preoccupations, urgencies or other distractions and can focus on what is truly important. Other common uninvited changes in life like illness, the death of a loved one, or loss of a job cause us to do the same thing. A week at camp or a retreat is a planned interruption for you, your children, a youth group, or church members which opens the mind and soul to God's work.
- 2. The Time Factor:** Simply put, one week of camp is more than a whole year of Sunday School. Do the math! I can spend more time with a student in five days than a full year of once a week, one hour interaction. And those one hour times are split up by full weeks of saturation from ungodly influence and input through media and peers. Camp, done right, is a saturation of God and His principles.
- 3. The Modeling Factor:** In the camp setting the principles that are being taught are also being lived out before the young people by their instructors and counselors. Not only do they *hear* how to follow Christ, but they *see* how to follow Christ and may get to put it into practice themselves. This modeling is very powerful especially as the students see their counselors and leaders live it out in all aspects of life - many times under stress. They see them in the morning when they first get up as well as late at night when they are tired. They see authenticity when dealing with behavior problems or challenges with weather or scheduling. They see them actually living what was taught! The conclusion is Christ is real in the lives of these people and can be in theirs as well.
- 4. The Experience Factor:** For many in today's society, especially in urban environments, nature and the out of doors are strangers. Being in a camp setting is a new experience. At camp we see God's glory in a different way and thereby learn more about Him and His character. Activities like hiking, archery and canoeing may not prepare anyone for their future career, but studies suggest that learning new skills does things in our brains that improve our capacity to learn. Young people need these kinds of experiences to grow and develop. Camp is also a memory maker that we can look back at and cherish for years to come.

These factors work together to produce amazing results in the lives of children and teens from urban environments who for some the only opportunity to be impacted with the Gospel in this powerful way might be a week of camp or a weekend retreat.

Rev. Craig Vincent  
Executive Director  
Streamside Camp & Conference Center  
303 Possinger Dr.  
Stroudsburg, PA 18360  
570-629-1902  
[craig@streamside.org](mailto:craig@streamside.org)  
[www.streamside.org](http://www.streamside.org)