



## **FCC Camp Gray Feasibility Task Force**

### **Summary Report to Flossmoor Community Church Board of Christian Education**

**November 2009**

The Camp Gray Feasibility Task Force met under with the following purpose to function:

*The purpose of this task force is to conduct a feasibility study regarding the FCC Camp Gray program. I know that Camp Gray is very dear to many people's hearts here at FCC, that it holds fond memories for many individuals and families, and that there are many people who have looked forward to participating in or having their children participate in FCC Camp Gray for many years. It has been an awesome experience for many children, not to mention the youth leaders and adults involved, and it deserves our attention in gathering accurate information and formulating well-thought-out ideas as we look at the "what next" question. While all that Camp Gray has been is very important, for several reasons, FCC Camp Gray did not happen this summer. There have been several issues discussed, and we will take a look at many of them as we look ahead. But, whatever the reasons were, and whatever has happened as part of the history of Camp Gray and the FCC experience there, our task is to look at what can be now.*

*Our job is NOT to make a decision about Camp Gray and whether FCC will go there next summer. Our job is to ask the important, and often difficult, questions and to gather information so that the Board of Christian Education can make a decision in either to move forward to next summer's planning. Our goal is to complete our study in time for the CE Board to have several days prior to their November meeting, keeping them up-to-speed along the way so that they have ample time to mull stuff over and make as accurate a choice as possible to present to the Governing Board. Therefore, we will work to be done with our study and have our data written into presentable information by November 1.*

*In order to accomplish a lot of work in a little time, there will be many times when each individual on this task force will be asked to do some "homework" and will then bring it to the collective group so that we can put the info in that segment together and move on to the next task at hand. Each person's independent work will be extremely important to the rest of the group!*

*We will look at many facets of Camp Gray in order to put our report together. Included, but not exclusively, we will look at the camp facility, cost, liability, staffing, programming, and timing. We will do as much comparison as possible so as not to be single-focused, and we will try to take in the transitions through which the church is moving as we determine what else we need to examine.*

In our studies, we put together the following information to offer the Board of Christian Education in order to help that board make the decision about how to proceed regarding a future camp experience for the children of Flossmoor Community Church:

1. **FACILITY** - At this point, it appears that Presbyterian Camps/Camp Gray may be our most viable setting available. Many camps do not let individual groups come in to run their own camps as they have staff in place. Most have such a full schedule with their own programs that they do not have any space available for a group our size. Below are the positive attributes and concerns regarding Camp Gray as our continued camp site, as well as a list of a couple of other possibilities:

**Positives of Camp Gray**

Beautiful setting  
On Lake Michigan  
A known site  
Tradition  
It is reasonably close and east to get to  
It is more cost effective  
Available June 14-19 (no school conflict for campers)  
Nurse will be on site 24/7 that week per camp office

**Concerns Regarding Camp Gray**

Facilities often shabby/unrepaired  
We are there during pre-camp – maintenance time  
ALL Staff is in training that week – not as good  
Don't know if camp will continue to be around  
past next year???

**Other possible sites examined**

**Conference Point Center** is located in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, on the shores of Geneva Lake. There are plenty of swimming and beach activities, plus sports fields for softball, volleyball, basketball, tennis, and a general field for soccer, football, lacrosse, rugby, and general group games.

- Housing availability for week of June 14-19 would be in their retreat buildings, which are more dorm-like not conducive to “cabin” groupings. Group would still have access to camp activity facilities. Camp housing only available for June 9-13, which could overlap with end of school year

**Pilgrim Park** is located outside of Princeton, Illinois, and is a UCC-related camp. Its facilities include several buildings for retreat and camp purposes, including “cabins,” low-ropes and high-ropes courses, archery, canoeing, and swimming. Swimming facilities are an in ground pool. The camp has a creek that runs through its grounds and is near to, but not on, the Illinois River. We have used this facility for youth retreats before.

- Housing availability June 9 – 13 ONLY, which could overlap the end of the school schedule should any snow days be utilized.

**Camp Greenwood** – North of Grand Rapids, MI: This camp setting offers 240 acres of land and 5 lakes. It can accommodate up to 130 people, and would have staff available to do specific programming, etc. There is a hospital within 3-4 miles of the camp, plus there are two Red Cross- certified people on staff who are on site from 7 AM – 10:30 PM each day and will administer all medications. We can either provide our own certified life guards or they have them available. Any of their staff that we use would come with a fee (including dining room staff, life guards, program staff, etc.). The camp is a 3 ½ hour drive from FCC, which is quite a distance for the kids to travel.

- Task force did not pursue additional information on availability due to distance. It was felt that the camp was too far away for our young campers, and too long of a round trip for adults riding on the buses to get the kids to camp.

2. **TIMING** – Traditionally, Camp Gray is held right after the school year gets out. Part of this timing has to do with the availability of camps open to us running our own program – after that first week, they are doing their own camps and don't always have space for us. The other has had to do with the fact that we staff the camp with youth/young adults as Camp Counselors and CIT's, who are all aged high school and above, and most of those folks, once they get into the full swing of summer, have jobs, athletics, music programming, etc. Family vacations tend to be later in the summer than the first week or two, as well, and looking for a week later in the summer months would be difficult, and so far we aren't finding any available.

This year, the timing that is available for us at Camp Gray is June 14-19, which would clear our elementary school calendar even with snow days (our elementary school districts have their last scheduled day, barring any snow/weather-related days off, on June 9<sup>th</sup>, which is a Wednesday, but could go as long as June 11th, and would only be one week beyond the high school schedule's end) . This would only leave Wednesday (they go for an hour that day), Thursday, Friday and Saturday for camp at some of the other facilities listed, as these facilities start their own programming the following week, generally on Sunday and don't have any additional space for us. While this push to the next full week might impact the schedules of some of our counselors, who will be out of high school already for a week, and potentially out of college well before that, it would ensure that our camp schedule would not be impacted, either in attendance or start-up time, by snow days at any level. Since parents are being asked to commit to camp, both in scheduling and financially, asking them to make a last-minute decision about whether their child should attend camp or finish the entire school year is something that we want to avoid. At this point, Camp Gray offers the best option as far as timing goes. However, it must be noted that moving to this week, while a better fit for our campers coming out of the elementary district, may take away from the availability of our quality high-school-aged counselors as summer school at HF will begin June 14. This may also cause a shortage of CITs as the state has upped the graduation requirements for this year's Freshman class and so more may be taking summer school.)

3. **STAFFING**- In addition to recognizing that there is a great deal of work that goes into preparing for camp (at least 100 person-hours), we also understand that some significant changes would need to take place in order for the camp to function at optimum safety and programming. These would include:

- A church staff person would need to be at camp in order for clear line of authority and accountability to be set. At this time, Camp Gray direction/staffing does not fall under the job description of any of our staff members. It was removed from the Director of Children's

Ministry job description in early 2009 when the position (now shared) was moved from full-time to ¾-time. For camp preparation and administration, the task force estimates an additional \$5,000 -8,000 (this may be low) necessary for this position, which would most likely encompass time from the month of January through June (fewer hours would be required at the beginning, and would build up incrementally to the full time at camp, plus some evaluation for the next year).

- Ratio of adults to children would need to be defined and adhered to (includes teens). The following determinations were made by the task force:

**Adults:** We have based the following on cabin size of 7-10 campers (Camp Gray has had 6 cabins). For the last several years, FCC has maintained a policy that there must be at least one adult (over 21 years of age) in each cabin. At Camp Gray, this means a minimum of 6 adults.

In terms of liability, we consulted our FCC “Child Protection Guide” and found the following guidelines:

*A ratio of one (1) adult for every eight (8) children must be maintained, with a minimum of two (2) adults at all times.*

*If an activity involves sleeping time (rest breaks or bedtime sleep) males and females will be separated and one adult of each gender will supervise.*

*For larger gatherings, a ratio of one (1) adult for every ten (10) children or youth will be maintained with a minimum of two (2) adults at all times.*

While camp can and has been done with that minimum number of adults, it is VERY difficult to lead the week with this small staff. Camp is 24/7 from Sunday through Friday for the staff. Not only are the adults serving a supervisory role in the cabins, the adults attending camp also lead programmed activities all day. The staff that we take to camp lead the following activities:

- Nature (1 adult)
  - Give back - a service project for the camp (1 adult)
  - Gray Art (at least 2 adults)
  - Worship planning (1 adult)
  - Baldy Hike - dunes (2 adults)
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Canoeing, kayaking, rock climbing and archery have been led by the Camp Gray staff, however, our adult staff is present at each activity. Staffing needs for these activities include:

- Canoeing (2 adults) 1 adult drives car down to river
- kayaking (1 adult)
- rock climbing (1 adult)
- archery (1 adult)

A different camp may have different (more/fewer) activities which could change our staffing needs.

This doesn't include leading counselor and co-counselor meetings, administering meds and providing first aid, leading beach games, coordinating free-time, helping with cabin groups, assisting with hoppers and meals, getting snacks ready, supervising CITs, communicating with facility staff, running into town for supplies, etc. Having more adults in camp also allows short periods of time off during the day, which assists ALL of us and keeps everyone able to "keep going" for the 96 hours that kids are in camp!

In addition to the minimum 6 adults, we recommended that there be at least 4 additional adults at camp, based on camper attendance of 45 children and 12 counselors. This would be an adult/camper ratio of approximately 1 adult per 6 campers, including counselors.

**Youth Counselors:** We recommended that each cabin have at least 2 counselors (minimum of 12 counselors). Our policy has been that you have to have completed Sophomore year to be eligible to serve as a counselor. *It should be reiterated that the 12 high school counselors also require adult supervision, so the number of children requiring adult supervision is really 57 (and if you add CITs it's even higher).*

**CITs:** Counselors in Training are extra staff and are very helpful if there is room to house them at camp. It has worked out well for CITs to have their own cabin/unit, as it allows room for more campers in the actual cabins. Our policy has been that you must have completed Freshman year to be eligible to apply for a CIT position. *If CITs are utilized they also require adult supervision.*

- A medical person would need to be present for the camp to administer medications and to deal with unexpected medical situations. In the recent past, a certified medical person has not been available to us during pre-camp at Camp Gray, nor have we had someone available from FCC. Asking someone to volunteer does not appear to be a viable solution. With the sheer number of medical situations that have begun to present themselves in the campers at camp, including medications, chronic conditions, and potential critical response conditions, as well as the severity of some of those issues, a non-trained medical officer is no longer an option. However, a board-certified medical professional is generally not allowed to "volunteer" time due to liability/malpractice insurance issues. Medical professionals do not fall under the Good Samaritan Act that a non-medical volunteer would fit into categorically, but a non-medical volunteer can no longer be expected to be responsible for the magnitude and variety of medical situations that have recently been introduced to the camp scenario. An insurance rider or policy for 1 week of camp would be very costly, if we could get it. Our best option is to have a camp medical staff person in place. (Camp Gray has confirmed that they will have a nurse on staff 24/7 that week.

- Note that the differences regarding a volunteer or staff member giving medications during camp as opposed to a retreat are that 1) retreats work with youth, who are older and are able to, as a general rule, self-administer under supervision and 2) the sheer number of children on medications has risen considerably)
- Campers would always need to have adult supervision, even if indirect
- Allowance would need to be made for “time off,” especially for counselors and CITs
- All other staff would be our volunteers. We would need to determine appropriate criteria for all staff positions in order to have the best staff chemistry for the campers. While we might have the camp’s staff available to us for some functions, (Camp Gray for water sports and kitchen), we are primarily responsible for our camp and its programming. We are not able to set up a camp that is run by the camp’s staff exclusively for FCC as all the camps with which we have spoken have their own programs already in place. They would not hire staff just for one camp, and they don’t have room for us with all their own programs.

We could promote a certain camp and make that an FCC focus, but the children would not be getting the same experience of interacting with our youth and adults. However, should the Board decide that FCC can no longer run its own camp on an annual basis, an option would be to either provide a list of good area-based church-related camps (Pilgrim Park, Tower Hill and Camp Gray all have summer programs), at which parents could look, or we could even choose a couple of camp experiences and send “groups” of children together so that they could be with fellow FCCers.

- 4. LIABILITY ISSUES** - While our insurance coverage is sufficient for events such as the camp, we would need to do several things to ensure that there are no gray (implied but not clearly stated and/or approved) areas regarding coverage and safety:
- Check to see if we need a rider to cover the week (we have not asked this question of our carrier yet so as not to raise red flags on their part)
  - Determine insurance issues as far as a medical person if it has to be our own
  - Follow Safe Church guidelines as accepted by our insurance program to make sure that we don’t leave them any wiggle room (we need to make sure that what we understand and have stated as Safe Church guidelines are clearly communicated to our insurance company and that they have given them the seal of approval – then they cannot state that they are insufficient in any way)
  - Get a copy of the camp’s insurance coverage as they have to hold liability in contracting with us to use their space
  - Activate full disclosure on medical and behavioral issues from parents in order for campers to be kept safe. Included would be physicals from physicians, forms returned in a timely manner, mandatory parent and camper meetings, covenant forms for staff and campers

- Special /difficult situations with campers would require parent attendance at the camp at the cost of the family

5. **COST** - Some of our staffing needs may raise the overall cost of camp. We would need to find ways to off-set and/or offer needs-based scholarships in order to be just in offering this as a church activity (where all are welcome). While, in the past, bus fees have been covered by PEGS and scholarships have been made available through the Men's and Women's Association and handled discreetly by the Director of Children's Ministries, we have not yet ascertained as to if, and/or what, funds would be available for this next year pending further decision regarding the status of camp. Informal information has been offered that the bus money would continue to be available from PEGS. There is no money set aside in the Christian Education budget for camp, either, and this year's program would go under the current budget. The last charged fee for campers was \$280 (2008). This fee does not reflect additional cost possibilities for a medical person, should we need to hire someone separately, or pay the camp for that person's services, nor does it reflect cost to cover a staff person responsible for the camp.

6. **PROGRAM** – While it was determined that there are some key changes that would need to be made in programming in order to accommodate the need to provide a safe experience for all campers, a great deal of time was not spent looking at the specifics of programming. The important issue under this category is for those involved in a camp experience, should one occur, to be held to the guidelines of Safe Church and the Core Values of FCC and our Children's Ministry. Of all the important components that were brought to the table about the values of such a camp, the opportunity for children to be connected with the youth/teens was repeatedly mentioned. Discussion ensued as to whether an off-site overnight camp experience is the best way for this to happen, whether it fits the philosophy of our current children's ministry program, and whether it enhances or takes from our current youth program. These are the things that were highlighted:

- Camp Gray has been a valuable way to connect children and youth at FCC
- Camp Gray is a wonderful way for children to go away from home in a safe environment and develop a strong church connection
- Overnight camp is not the only way we might achieve these goals. A day experience, on campus or close to home might be developed. It would not have the same flavor or intensity, perhaps, as Camp Gray or another away camp
- Youth programming might be hampered by our current camp schedule as it is difficult to also plan a youth or youth/adult mission trip. Many of the youth have summer school, have summer jobs, and later in the summer infringes on music and athletic prep training for the next school year, so their availability time is already limited.

These issues should be considered when determining whether or not to move forward with camp. Also, having camp the following week, while important from the standpoint of the

children's school schedule, might cause a drastic drop in high school involvement if it overlaps with summer school as high school state requirements have gone up significantly this past year.

The Camp Gray Feasibility Task Force put in countless hours, both gathered and independently, to gather the above information. It is our hope that the Board of Christian Education and the Governing Board of Flossmoor Community Church will utilize this information to make the best possible decision for our children, our youth, and our congregation. Camp Gray has been a wonderful experience for countless children and youth, as well as many of the adults who donated their time and energy to working the camp. It has also been a key tradition of the church. It is important to have good church experiences for our young people and good traditions to enhance our church life. This report in no way minimizes these realities. It does bring up significant concerns that we must address if we are to proceed with Camp Gray, or any other camp. While we have determined that we are certainly able to overcome these concerns, the board must determine if it is feasible to do so within the confines of our resources, our stewardship, and our philosophy as a congregation.

We humbly submit these findings to you, are available to you as needed, and will keep you in prayer during this time of discernment,

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