

Adventure Challenge Ministries

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I entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as a freshman in the fall of 1998. I knew nothing about life, and had just become a Christian in the last few months while at a Young Life camp in Colorado. This decision effected me greatly in my everyday life. Instead of doing things for myself, I did them for Jesus Christ. My family expected me to be pre-med, and for a while I expected this too, but then I realized that God was pulling me away from this field. I realized that future income should not be the sole reason that I chose a major, and began to explore areas of study that I enjoyed. I looked into exercise science because I have always been an athlete, but it did not really interest me. I then researched the Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries major, but saw that it was not exactly what I wanted to do either.

Feeling hopeless, I spoke with a friend in the honors program. She suggested that if I did not see a major that fit my career goals, I should design my own major. I cynically asked her how I could do that, and she responded with the suggestion to apply to the College Scholars program. I became very excited with the idea that I might be able to design my own major, as long as I was accepted into the program. Over the next few months of my freshman year, I tried to figure out what I wanted to do with my life and my education. Most of the classes that I had enrolled in thus far were core requirements, so I had not really taken anything that I had enjoyed. Then I decided to enroll in a religious studies class, which opened my eyes up to various religions. I really enjoyed this class because after recently becoming a Christian, I wanted to know why people believed what they did, and this course helped to answer some of those questions. I also took a recreation and tourism management class, which taught me about outdoor

leadership. This thoroughly interested me as well, so I thought that maybe I had found my niche.

Meanwhile, I had been volunteering at a Young Life camp in Weaverville, North Carolina called Windy Gap. Here, I would work on their ropes course and rock-climbing wall on the weekends. I loved this job because I was outdoors, and I was helping to minister to high school students. It became clear to me that God wanted me to be involved in a camping ministry, and this helped me to design my major proposal for College Scholars.

After being accepted into the College Scholars program, I began taking classes in my major, which consisted of religious studies and recreation and tourism management. The religious studies courses discussed a variety of religions, including Christianity. They helped me to understand the faith of others and defend my faith. The recreation classes taught me management and leadership techniques that I would need in order to be a successful employee in the camping/outdoor field. My urban ecology course raised my awareness and educated me about the environment, especially the state of our bioregion, the Katuah bioregion. My wildland recreation class helped me understand proper practices to use in an outdoor recreation setting.

Overall, I felt that I was learning a great deal of useful information that I could use in my future career. When it came time to choose a topic for my final project, I decided to integrate my education the best way I knew how. I did this by designing a Christian camping ministry entitled Adventure Challenge Ministries.

This project uniquely wove three areas of study together: outdoor recreation, ecology, and religion (with an emphasis in Christianity). After discussing each subject

separately, the three were blended to form the heart of the project; a college camping ministry entitled Adventure Challenge Ministries. The main focus of ACM is the Christian faith, yet it intricately involves outdoor recreation and environmental sustainability.

Various terms have been used interchangeably to describe outdoor recreation, including outdoor adventure, adventure recreation, high adventure, risk recreation, outdoor pursuits, and natural challenge activities. A few components must be present for an accurate definition to be made concerning outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation obviously will involve interaction with the natural environment. By engaging in an activity, the interaction may include an element of risk. The risk is usually physical, concerning injury or death, although in some cases it can be emotional or material.¹

In outdoor adventure, the risk is usually calculated and controlled to some degree. Pursuits may be both structured and nonstructured. With all of this said, the best working definition for the term may be as follows: "A variety of self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment, that contain elements of real or apparent danger, in which the outcome, while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstance."²

By participating in outdoor recreation, a person has the potential to benefit psychologically, sociologically, physically, and educationally. Psychological benefits include confidence, self-actualization, and well being. Gaining a sense of compassion, belonging, and respect for others may help someone sociologically. Nature awareness,

¹ Ewert, Alan W., *Outdoor Adventure Pursuits: Foundations, Models, and Theories* (Publishing Horizons, Inc., 1989) 3.

² Ewert, *Outdoor Adventure Pursuits*, 6.

value clarification, and increased problem solving skills embody educational benefits.

Physical benefits would obviously include strength, coordination, exercise, and balance.³

Studies in outdoor recreation have shown a relationship between activities participated in with variables such as age, income, education, and occupation. The following table displays this information from a sample study. Age is strongly related to recreation activities requiring physical strength and endurance. Income generally tends to only affect activities that require a high cost for participation. The only activity strongly related to occupation is cross-country skiing. Education level is usually middle to high.⁴

Race has been related to a number of resource-oriented activities such as camping, skiing, and snowmobiling. Minority cultures have been found to use and prefer recreation facilities and services that are “urban-oriented” or closer to their homes. They generally participate in activities in highly developed facilities and have a longer length of stay. The activities tend to be more fitness or sports oriented.⁵ A lack of discretionary funds, lack of transportation, and inadequate information about activities also explains why minorities are less likely to participate in outdoor recreation. White people, on the other hand, tend to participate in traditional outdoor recreation activities quite often.⁶

Diversity may be found in many aspects of outdoor recreation. A variety of recreational activities, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of participants,

³ Ewert, *Outdoor Adventure Pursuits*, 49.

⁴ Manning, Robert E., *Studies in Outdoor Recreation: Search and Research for Satisfaction* (Oregon University Press, 1999) 26-29.

⁵ Manning, *Studies in Outdoor Recreation*, 37.

⁶ Johnson, Cassandra Y., J.M. Bowker, D.B.K. English, Dreamal Worthen, *Theoretical Perspectives of Ethnicity and Outdoor Recreation: A Review and Synthesis of African-American and European-American Participation* (Southern Research Station, 1997) 4.

experience level, and motivation for participation all factor into this diversity. For example, a whitewater-rafting trip might have a group that consists of novices and experts, male and female, black and white. Some may be teens, while others might be adults. A few might be participating as guides, while the rest are seeking a thrill.

Outdoor recreation and ecology are directly related to one another. A sustainable ecological environment is necessary in order for outdoor adventure pursuits to be able to take place. Sustainable ecology refers to the idea that the natural environment is capable of being continued without eroding its ability to sustain itself.⁷ Generally there are four paradigms designated to describe the human relationship to the environment. These include the Traditional Ecological Paradigm (TEP), the Christian Ecological Paradigm (CEP), the Human Exceptionalism Paradigm (HEP), and the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP).

The Traditional Ecological Paradigm is best illustrated by Native American culture. A fundamental belief of the TEP is that humans are a part of nature. Nature serves as a model for human virtue, a guide for spiritual development, and a source of life itself. Those who follow the TEP live in harmony with their environment.⁸

Theologians have been constructing the Christian Ecological Paradigm over many centuries. Christians view time in linear terms rather than cyclical terms, such as Native Americans. Along with linear time came the story of creation. The creation story suggests that man was God's finest work, and God gave man dominion over all earthly things. Adam and Eve lived in a utopia in the Garden of Eden. After the fall, they were forced to

⁷ Wallace, Samuel E., *Sustainable Urban Ecology* (Graphic Creations, 2001) 4.

⁸ Wallace, *Urban Ecology*, 73.

leave and thus the natural world became corrupted. The view that man is superior to all creatures has led to a reduced concern by Christians for the environment.⁹ Later, opposing Christian views will be discussed as it is shown that Christian environmental organizations are becoming more prevalent.

The Christian Ecological Paradigm has heavily influenced the Human Exceptionalism Paradigm. The HEP is best described as a secular version of the CEP. The HEP's ideology states that humans are exempt from structures governing all other earthly organisms. Resources are seen as materials and energy that should be used without any regard for consequences. The HEP is quite anthropocentric in nature, and very damaging to the environment.¹⁰

The New Ecological Paradigm embraces the concept that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. Soil, water, plants, and animals are all inclusive of this community, and thus humans must have respect for all other members of the community. According to the NEP, the world is finite, so resources should be used in the most ecologically conscious manner since supplies are limited.¹¹

Many Christians have shifted their worldview from the CEP to the NEP. They came to the conclusion that it is the necessity of a Christian to have an environmentally conscious attitude. Numerous Christian environmental organizations have been founded in light of this philosophy.

⁹ Wallace, *Urban Ecology*, 83-84.

¹⁰ Wallace, *Urban Ecology*, 84.

¹¹ Wallace, *Urban Ecology*, 84-85.

The North American Coalition for Christianity and Ecology (NACCE) was established in 1986 to encourage Christians to heal the earth out of concern and love for God's creation. NACCE is an ecumenical, voluntary, tax-exempt organization. The NACCE has four main goals: to address effectively the continuing desecration of the earth; to bring Christians into a loving relationship with the earth by facilitating the formation of regional earthkeeping ministries; to teach reverence for God's creation, realizing that humans are not separate from the natural world; and finally, to provide information and resources for studying environmental issues in the context of biblical theology and contemporary science.¹²

Eco-churches are small ecumenical groups of Christians whose mission is to make humanity an integral part of creation, develop more active participants in the spiritual-environmental revolution, and organize a grassroots movement inspired by the love of every part of God's creation. Worship services include prayers, songs, and sermons that relate to environmental awareness, as well as teaching environmental education. II Corinthians 5:19 embraces the Eco-church's ideology when it states that "God is reconciling the whole world, or cosmos, through Christ." Eco-churches promote a simple, environmentally sensitive lifestyle.¹³

Earth Justice Ministries provide worship, educational, and creative experiences that are grounded in an awareness of God's creation. This non-profit corporation educates people about spiritual and ethical issues related to ecological destruction and growing

¹² <http://www.nacce.org/homepage.html> Accessed October 5, 2001.

¹³ <http://www.nacce.org/1998/eco-church.html> Accessed October 5, 2001.

inequity, as well as assisting victims of ecological destruction.¹⁴ These organizations are just a few of the multitude of Christian environmental organizations.

Martin Luther once said that, “God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars.” Psalm 25 states the “The Word of God is in the Waters.” Psalms 8, 104 and 148 reaffirm the goodness of creation and provide additional insights into our relation to nature. The myth of Noah’s Ark shows God’s compassion to all living creatures. It also presents the first covenant from God; Yahweh includes all living creatures in this covenant, not just humans. Many passages in the New Testament, such as Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:15-23 indicate that Christ’s redemptive power affects the whole creation.

Through education from these organizations, many Christians have come to know God not only as a redeemer, but also as the Creator of all life. They have shown that in preserving wildness, such as forests, Christians have not only particular manifestations of God’s creation but places in which they can deeply worship God. Christians have begun to shift their view to that of the New Ecological Paradigm, which can impact the environment in a more positive manner.

Religion has been prevalent in the United States since its existence as a nation. Christianity in particular has been the dominant religion of the United States. Thus, our nation has been rooted in a Judeo-Christian society. However, the modern era gave rise to a more secular society, and religious pluralism has also become more prevalent. People have become disenchanted with Christianity in general, so an overall drop in church membership has taken place. Many were searching for a change, while others were

¹⁴ <http://www.earth-justice.org/> Accessed October 5, 2001.

satisfied with worldly concerns. In the 1950's the New Left emerged as a strong political and religious force. Middle and upper class college students around the country dominated the movement. It embodied a more liberal Christian theology, which seemed to cater to this generation and offer an alternative to the religious right.¹⁵

While the New Left did help stimulate religious growth, there was, and still is, an alarming number of young adults who break away from their church membership. One theory to support this data is that young adults in America are consumed with personal growth and self-fulfillment. Most young adults who leave their respective churches are well educated and committed to success. This would explain why college students tend to leave church, because they are consumed by graduating and finding a career with a lucrative income. It can again be assumed that secularization plays a major role in the drop, and a third theory suggests that this break is a life cycle event that entails distance from the church as a young adult, and a return to the church later in life. Young adults often want their own identity that is separate from their parents, so leaving the church their parents made them attend is a way of shaping this identity.¹⁶

Regardless of the reason, I believe that it is necessary to return college students who have left church to a Christian lifestyle. Because of this, I have chosen to create Adventure Challenge Ministries.

¹⁵Rossinow, Doug., *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁶Leslie J. Francis and Yaacov J. Katz, eds., *Joining and Leaving Religion: Research Perspectives* (Gracewing, 2000) 88.

The Ministry

Adventure Challenge Ministries (ACM) is a non-profit organization designed to reach troubled college students and young adults through recreational activities. ACM embodies non-denominational Christian principles, which rely solely on the teachings of the Holy Bible and Jesus Christ, rather than consuming its time with interdenominational theological squabbles over things such as predestination and the concept of baptism. ACM's mission is to help young adults gain an understanding and relationship with Jesus Christ.

ACM would have a few staff positions, but the majority of people working with the organization would be volunteers. Full time employees would include the ACM president, a secretary, a camp director, a camp property maintenance manager, and a cook/food service employee. Part time employees would consist of another property maintenance employee, a store clerk, and another cook. Volunteers would help to run the activities of the camp, as well as help with camp maintenance. Volunteers would not be able to run activities until an ACM staff member properly trained them. ACM would also use volunteers in leadership positions to meet young adults and bring them to camp. Every person working with the organization would need to be a Christian. By Christian, it is assumed that one believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and they follow the teachings of the Holy Bible. Full time staff would also need a college degree and any other certifications necessary.

Before recreational activities can occur through ACM there must be people to participate. Volunteers and staff would need to meet young adults, with college campuses being the ideal setting for this to occur since so many people are congregated in one area.

ACM members would meet these people just like they would meet any other ordinary person. By building relationships with these young adults and gaining trust in their eyes, ACM leaders are earning the opportunity to tell their friends about the Gospel. Once friendships have formed, leaders would then encourage their friends to go with them on a weekend getaway to an ACM camp. Here they will partake in various recreational activities and a speaker will present them with the Gospel in a very relaxed, informal manner.

In *It's a Sin to Bore a Kid*, Char Meredith conveys the message that the Gospel should not be presented in a way that is going to shy a person away from knowing Jesus.¹⁷ Because of this ACM does not want to embrace a church camp atmosphere. The camp experience should be fun and allow the camper to feel comfortable, regardless of their beliefs. If ACM camps have a church stigma around them, those who are not Christians may be discouraged and unwilling to attend. Once campers come, and if they decide to trust Jesus as their savior, they would then be encouraged to attend a Christian church for spiritual growth. I want to make it very clear that I believe the church is very important for Christian growth and fellowship, but because ACM aims to reach those that are not Christians, I do not want an ACM camp to be directly associated with church.

Camp activities would vary depending upon the camp's geographical location. Whistling Pines, the camp I will be discussing, is fictitiously located in the mountains of East Tennessee. Its activities include caving, rappelling, rock climbing, mountain biking, mountain boarding, and a high ropes course. Campers would stay in cabins with their leaders; cabin assignments would not be co-ed. They would participate in these activities

¹⁷ Meredith, Char, *It's a Sin to Bore a Kid* (Word Books, 1989).

by cabin. Each activity is designed to push people to their limits, both physically and mentally. The fear factor in these pursuits is designed to cause campers to rely on a higher power.

For example, caving (or spelunking as it is often called) is basically hiking on the inside of a mountain. Because caves are dark, wet, and slippery, this can be a dangerous activity. Headlamps, helmets, and ropes would be necessary equipment. The cave would not be extremely difficult for an expert, but it would definitely push a novice to their limits. A trained guide would take campers into the cave. Hopefully the darkness and uncertainty of the campers' surroundings would cause them to trust something more than themselves.

Rappelling and rock climbing would occur near the caving site because of its rocky terrain. Climbers would need to rely on ropes, harnesses, carabiners, and helmets for safety. These activities would most certainly push anyone who has a fear of heights or free falling. Again, a trained guide would help campers find good climbing routes, as well as insure that they are secured properly while rappelling. If someone could not physically climb to the top, they would be able to walk up a nearby trail to rappel down the mountain.

A high ropes course would be placed in the middle of a heavily wooded area. Trained personnel would be on various elements of the course to ensure the campers' safety. Similar to rock climbing and rappelling, the necessary equipment would include helmets, ropes, harnesses, and carabiners. Elements on the course would include walking on thin cables, climbing a cargo net, and using a zip line. To finish the course, a person must attempt to jump and catch a trapeze bar that is suspended about forty feet in the air.

I have personally worked on a ropes course, and it seems to be the activity that most commonly breaks people. I witnessed many people trusting God while they were suspended in the trees, and hopefully the same results would occur at Whistling Pines. They would be encouraged to continue to trust God in their daily lives not just when they are afraid.

Mountain boarding is a relatively new sport that most people are unaware of. A mountain board is built like a skateboard, but it has very large wheels. Bindings on top of the board secure a person's feet so they do not fall off. A hand-held cable braking system is used to stop the board. Like snowboarding, you ride the mountain board down a mountainside. Since most campers would probably be very inexperienced at this sport, the incline would not be very steep or rocky. Helmets, kneepads, and elbow pads must be worn when participating in this activity. Before campers would ride down the terrain, an experienced guide would walk riders through proper riding instructions. The danger of the sport and lack of experience of the riders would probably induce a fear factor, which would hopefully cause campers to rely on God for their safety.

Mountain biking would be an activity that many people could adapt to, because at some point in their life, most people have ridden a bicycle. The degree of difficulty would not be as high as the other activities, but it would still be challenging. Helmets would be a necessary safety precaution. A trained guide would take the riders on a designated trail.

A basketball court would be available for campers to use during their free time. The court would be covered so people could play during inclement weather. A multipurpose field would be placed next to the basketball court. Here campers could play a variety of sports, including football, soccer, and ultimate Frisbee. A Frisbee golf course

would also be set up around the camp. Trees would be used for the various holes of the Frisbee golf course.

The dining hall would obviously be where campers eat. Two meals would be provided each day, one at mid-morning and one at dinner. A snack shop would be located in the dining hall for those that want to eat more than twice a day. It would have smoothies, juice drinks, energy bars, and other healthy snacks. The food served would be as healthy as possible and every effort would be made to purchase organic foods. Also, a garden would be on camp property to provide for some fruits and vegetables.

Limited staff housing would be available for staff members and volunteers who run the activities. Leaders would stay with campers in camper cabins. While most staff members would not live on camp property, they would have the option to stay in staff housing while they are working. During the summer there would be weeklong camps, but in the school year camps would be limited to weekend sessions. Staff members would more than likely stay at camp during weekend sessions, but they could choose to stay at home during weeklong camps. Staff housing would be similar to dorm facilities. Volunteers would have roommates and would share a community bath. Paid staff would have small cabins that have their own bedroom and bath.

Camper housing would be built like very large cabins. The rooms in the cabins would have bunk beds, with capacity at a maximum of fifteen people per room. Each room would have three showers and three toilets.

A small camp store and meeting room would be located in the same building as the dining hall. The store would sell T-shirts, hats, stickers, patches, water bottles, candy,

sweatshirts, shorts, Christian music, and Christian books. All proceeds from the store would be used to improve the camp.

The meeting room would be where campers come in direct contact with the Gospel. A speaker would share the Gospel with them in a very open manner, and in a way that would relate to the campers. There would be no pressure or “alter calls”; it would just be a time to make them think about what they believe. The speaker would only talk for about ten or fifteen minutes and then campers would return to their cabins. Here, leaders would discuss with the campers the ideas that were brought forth in the speaker’s message. Again, it would be quite informal, and there would be no pressure to “convert,” although it would be encourage.

Deuteronomy 8:7-9 states:

“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.:

With this in mind, it is our goal to keep Whistling Pines as clean as possible. Trash cans and recycling bins would be located throughout the camp. Native trees and vegetation would surround the camp, and every effort would be made to let wildlife in the surrounding area roam as they please.

Whistling Pines would comply with the American Disabilities Act. All trails would be flat so wheel chairs could navigate them. Ramps would be made available when necessary. We want anyone to be able to easily access our camp. While this camp is not

specifically designed to for people with disabilities, those who are disabled could participate in some of the activities. I have personally seen a person who was confined to a wheel chair participate in rappelling and a ropes course.

Equipment would be bought used or at the wholesale level. Profit from the camp store would help to buy the safest and most up-to-date equipment necessary for each activity. Staff members would train all volunteers before they would be able to use the equipment and instruct campers.

The camp would hopefully own between 75-100 acres of land. Some of this would be unused so expansion could occur if necessary. In expansion, as few trees would be cut down as possible. Hopefully the land would be bought from someone who believes in the ministry so that it might be attained at a good price.

Campers could come as often as they would like, as long as there is ample room. We want them to come as they are; if they smoke, a smoking area would be designated for them. Here again, we do not want the camp to be viewed as a church-sponsored event. The following types of insurance would be purchased; property damage, liability, umbrella, camper and staff medical/accident coverage, and workman's compensation. Liability policies are generally not sold under one million dollars with an in-house binder. Twenty-five million-dollar umbrella coverage is recommended.¹⁸

Fundraising would be necessary to help reduce the expenses of the camp. ACM would seek outside donations and even monetary support from churches. A few of the annual fundraisers would include a golf tournament, a hike, a formal banquet, and a run/walk.

¹⁸ <http://www.camphelp.com/camp-staff.html> Accessed November 17, 2001.

Until an ACM camp could be purchased and built, services would be contracted out and campers/leaders would camp in the woods. This would help to alleviate insurance costs. A typical week of this type of camping could be as follows. The trip would begin with a group of 10-15 people. They would commute to Tsali, North Carolina and mountain bike for a day. They would camp out and begin backpacking for the next five days in the Nantahala or Pisgah National Forest. Then the last day, they would go whitewater rafting on the Nantahala River. Each day, a leader would talk about the Gospel during meals, and open dialogue could occur as they are hiking.

Hopefully, through God's creation, the speaker conveying the message of the Gospel, and the recreational activities, campers would be challenged to make positive choices in life. Most importantly, the ministry's prayer would be that campers would come to know Jesus Christ in a personal manner. We know that not everyone will choose to do so, but if the camp makes a difference in just one person's life, then its work has been done properly.

Appendix

ACM Budget

One Time Costs

Mountain Bikes (15@\$150.00 each)- \$2250.00
 Mountain Boards 915@\$100.00 each)- \$1500.00
 Harnesses (45@\$40.00 each)- \$1800.00
 Helmets (75@\$25.00 each)-\$1875.00
 Ropes (10@\$35.00 each)-\$350.00
 Headlamps (15@\$20.00 each)-\$300.00
 Elbow and Knee Pads (15 sets@\$25.00 per set)-\$375.00
 Camping Fly (4@\$50.00 each)-\$200.00
 Lanterns (10@\$20.00 each)-\$200.00
 Sleeping Bag (15@\$75.00 each)-\$1125.00
 Camping Stove (4@\$35.00 each)-\$140.00
 Camp Truck (used)-\$15,000.00
 Camp Van (used)-\$20,000.00
 Property Purchase-\$1,000,000.00
One Time Cost Total: \$1,045,115.00

Annual Costs

ACM President-\$35,000.00
 ACM Secretary-\$25,000.00
 Camp Diretor-\$30,000.00
 Property Maintenance Manager-\$28,000.00
 Food Service Manager-\$25,000.00
 Camp Secretary-\$25,000.00

All part time employee costs are computed using 20 hours a week, 52 weeks a year.

Property Maintenance (part time, \$8.00 per hour)-\$8,320.00
 Store Clerk (part time, \$8.00 per hour)-\$8,320.00
 Cook (part time, \$8.00 per hour)-\$8,320.00

Summer months are May, June, July, and August, with the other 8 being non-summer months.

Camp Electric Bill

Summer Months(\$2,200.00 per month)-\$8,800.00
 Non-Summer Months (\$1,200.00)-\$9,600.00

Camp Water Bill

Summer Months (\$3,500.00 per month)-\$14,000.00
 Non-Summer Months (\$1,400.00 per month)-\$11,200.00

Camp Phone(\$125.00 per month)-\$1,500.00

Camp Food

Summer Months (\$1,500.00 per month)-\$6,000.00

Non-Summer Months (\$800.00 per month)-\$6,400.00

Equipment Repair Fund-\$10,000.00

Annual Total:\$318,060.00