

# Ministry Assessment

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## Orchard Crest Camp Christian Church (DOC), Southeast Gateway Area



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To: Penny Ross-Corona, Area Minister  
Orchard Crest Task Force

From: Jody Oates, Consultant  
**KALEIDOSCOPE inc.**

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Orchard Crest Camp is owned and operated by the Southeast Gateway Area (SEGA) of the Christian Church (DOC). Presently Orchard Crest is primarily used for youth summer camps, serving about 100-120 campers each season. There are only a few spring and fall retreats because the camp water system is not winterized.

The Orchard Crest Task Force and SEGA leadership are exploring the feasibility of continuing to maintain and operate the camp. The challenges include:

- The fact that winterization of the water system would be very costly because of the rock formations on the site.
- There is much deferred maintenance with additional damage from recent storms.

KALEIDOSCOPE inc. was asked to assist SEGA leaders in making this decision by assessing the current conditions and defining the criteria for the camp to be vital and viable as a ministry and operation.

The consultant, Jody Oates, visited Orchard Crest Camp on November 17, 2009 and met with local and Area leaders who are members of the Orchard Crest Task Force. He also reviewed usage, financial reports, and survey feedback previously gathered by SEGA.

This report includes the observations and feedback regarding the facilities and ministry at Orchard Crest.

### **Baseline Information**

- SEGA is made up of 43 congregations in the southeast part of Missouri, including the St. Louis metro area.
- Roughly two-thirds of the congregations are located in the St. Louis area with one-third located south of the Festus area.
- Considerably more than two-thirds of the campers and volunteer leaders come from the greater St. Louis metro area.
- Orchard Crest is made up of 214 acres of rolling land just outside of Fredericktown, Missouri.
- The staffing of Orchard Crest includes a part time caretaker who lives on the property and seasonal staff hired for the summer program.
- Orchard Crest has hosted 109 campers on average each summer for the past five summers (2004-2008). Summer camp has been offered over a period of 6-8 weeks with each week hosting roughly 15-30 campers per week. These camp sessions have been offered for children,

youth (grades 3-12) and families and are led by volunteer camp directors and volunteer counselors.

- The operating budget at Orchard Crest has realized a deficit the past several years of \$10,000 or more even while it is subsidized by gift income of \$30,000. The operation of Orchard Crest costs roughly \$40,000 more than the income from guests.
- A significant storm in May 2009 destroyed much of the forest at Orchard Crest and caused major damage to many of the buildings. This storm forced summer camp to be relocated to Rickman Center in Jefferson City and Camp Mo-Val in Union. Orchard Crest has not been usable since the storm.
- Clean up from the storm continues as loggers clear the downed and damaged trees.
- Summer camp 2010 will be held at Rickman Center in partnership with the Northeast and Ozark Lakes Areas of the Christian Church.

### **Successful Summer Camps 2009**

KALEIDOSCOPE inc. works with many camps and observes how successful camps operate. The following are characteristics seen in vital camp programs:

- Clear and focused mission – they know why they exist and who they serve
- Camper housing with clean, modern bathrooms which allow for privacy, especially for bathing
- Serve 75-100 campers per week-long camp session for 8-10 weeks per summer
- Offer multiple styles of camp programs to appeal to many campers
- Multiple recreation options, including high adventure areas (challenge courses, climbing walls, high ropes, zip lines), water recreation areas, significant craft programs (like pottery)
- Meal service to serve varying allergies and needs of today's children
- Two adult staff for each cabin group of campers (typically 2 staff per 12-16 campers, depending on age of camper)

### **Mission and Ministry**

KALEIDOSCOPE inc. believes camp and retreat ministry is a powerful tool for changing lives and works with centers to clarify their mission and purpose. As the consultant reflected with the Task Force about the mission of Orchard Crest's ministry, the following was shared by the Task Force members:

- Camp is for the kids
- Camp is for meeting new people and forming new life-long friendships
- Camp is for children and youth to experience the outdoors
- Camp is to provide child care for campers
- Camp is for Christian education and community building so that guests might experience God in an outdoor setting
- Camp should provide an excellent, meaningful opportunity for outdoor ministry

The consultant observed a clear passion for the ministry for children and youth in a camp setting.

### **Review of Orchard Crest Facilities**

The facilities at Orchard Crest were built in the 1960's in a fairly small area of the 214 acre-property. The facilities include:

1. Ten youth cabins (each with an indoor bathroom and shower) that sleep 10 people in bunk beds
2. Two small conference centers (small meeting room with a residential-style kitchen and bathrooms)
3. Open air chapel building
4. Director's cabin (3 bedrooms and a kitchen)
5. Nurse's cabin (2 bedrooms and kitchen)

6. Craft building (2 rooms)
7. Dining Hall (with commercial kitchen)
8. Pool and bath house
9. Caretaker's house

#### Basic Maintenance

There is a great deal of maintenance work to be completed on every building. This work includes replacing broken doors and screens, replacing equipment that no longer works, painting interior and exterior areas, and repairing decks. There are also issues with general cleanliness, including a challenging problem of mold in all of the buildings. While the storm and subsequent closing of the property has contributed to some of the recent lack of basic maintenance, it appears this facility has been in poor repair for some time. Basic maintenance projects have not been completed due to a lack of funding both in supplies and labor.

#### Major Maintenance

There is also a great deal of major maintenance that needs to be completed on the property including replacing a commercial freezer in the dining hall, upgrading electrical systems, replacing windows, repairing and replacing roofs, repairing roads, adding efficient heating and cooling systems, updating furnishings, resurfacing play courts, just to name a few. There have been no capital funds to invest in these major maintenance items.

#### Recreation Areas

There are very limited facilities for recreation at Orchard Crest. The pool and pool house are small and aging and in need of general maintenance and upgrades. The basketball court will need replaced as it has many cracks and uneven surfacing. The backstop at the fields needs replaced as well as the volleyball equipment. The river provides a great area for exploring and creek walking. At one time a pond was dug on the property to add a larger water feature, but it doesn't hold water.

#### Storm Damage

The 2009 storm did significant damage to the property. Most of the cabins were damaged, including one that will need demolished, many needing roof repair and others that will need a complete replacement of the bathrooms. The outdoor chapel building was also damaged by the storm with a pillar broken that will need replaced. Presently there are many brush piles around the property and many fallen trees that are being cleaned up. This clean-up process is going to be ongoing for several more months. Those who have enjoyed the thick forest of Orchard Crest will be shocked to see the devastation of the forest. It will take several years for the forest to reclaim its beauty.

#### **Assessment: A Perfect Storm**

Many factors have led to the decline of Orchard Crest and the present situation that is causing leaders to consider the future ministry. The factors include:

- Present economy
  - Families are considering the best value to spend the limited resources they have. For many, funding summer camp is not a viable choice unless the camp is perceived to have an exceptional value and outcome for their child. While Orchard Crest's fees are much less than competitors, the perceived value is likely very low.

- Declining denomination
  - The local Disciples of Christ churches in the Southeast Gateway Area are aging and declining in membership. Therefore the numbers of campers available for a summer camp program are diminishing.
- Aging facilities
  - All of the facilities at Orchard Crest are in similar stages of disrepair. Because of the lack of funding, ongoing maintenance concerns and updating of facilities was not possible. Simply catching up on maintenance concerns will be very costly.
- Storm damage
  - The May 2009 storm caused great damage. The settlement from the insurance company was for limited funds (\$57,000) for replacement of damaged areas. Clearing of the downed trees by loggers will also provide some limited funding, but not enough to repair/replace damaged facilities.

These factors combined have created a “perfect storm” for Orchard Crest’s continued viable operation.

### **Options & Questions to Consider**

#### 1. Re-invest in Orchard Crest facilities and ministry

With the rolling land and pastoral setting, Orchard Crest is a beautiful location for a camp. The consultant believes it would not be a good stewardship of resources to invest much time or money in the present facilities (the open air chapel and the dining hall may be exceptions).

New construction needs to include:

- new youth cabins with bathrooms for a capacity of 120 people
- new health center / leadership housing
- new pool / water park area (including new pool house)
- new high adventure recreation areas
- new indoor gathering/recreation building
- new shelters for small and large groups

This will be a SEVERAL million dollar project to re-create the facilities, even if volunteers provided some of the labor.

The primary question for this option:

- What is the capacity of SEGA for revitalization of Orchard Crest both in terms of capital and viable operations in the future?
  - Does the Area and its local churches have the ability to raise several million dollars to re-build Orchard Crest?
  - Does the Area and its local churches have the number of campers necessary, at least 75-100 campers per week for 8-10 weeks, to create an economically viable summer camp operation? Or is the Area able to partner with another organization to fill the beds for summer camp?

#### 2. Divest of Orchard Crest & move program

The facilities and site serve as a tool for the program of summer camp. Summer camp could be offered at other locations such as Rickman Center or other camps in the area.

The primary question for this option:

- If summer camp is not held at Orchard Crest, what is the most effective and most efficient way to serve children and youth in a summer camp setting for SEGA?

## **Recommendations**

### Missional Focus

SEGA needs to be clear about the mission and values of outdoor ministry for the children, youth and families in its churches. If the mission is about connecting campers to God in a natural setting AND a value is to do so in a way most economical to the Area, then leadership needs to seek the best place to serve the program and maintain the mission and values.

### Orchard Crest Site and Facilities

The consultant believes the present condition of Orchard Crest and the limited amount of campers available in the Area makes it necessary to divest of the Orchard Crest property. The proceeds could be invested to provide funding for summer camp ministry for SEGA campers at another location. It is feasible that with investment of the funds, the Area could offer more assistance to more campers and increase the numbers presently being served while serving them with higher quality.

### Program

The SEGA summer camp program could be offered in a number of ways:

1. In partnership with other camp programs (within the DOC or other similarly minded partners)
2. Rent a camp to offer a camp event for each age group
3. Publicize other Christian camps available for DOC members

## **Lifecycle of an organization**

Organizations go through a natural lifecycle of birth to old age. Some organizations are able to revitalize and begin with a new start. The summer camp program can be revitalized for SEGA, but in a new location outside of Orchard Crest. The consultant believes the facilities and site of Orchard Crest should be celebrated, the program moved to another location(s) and the assets re-allocated for ministry.

Youth Summer Camp Cabin



Open Air Chapel

