

EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH THROUGH DAY CAMP

This guide is given to you by Lutheran Outdoor Ministries of Florida. This is compiled from the work of Mary Forell-Davis through the ELCA Churchwide office.

Summer program can be an invitation to the community to participate in the life of your congregation.

There are some congregations who for ten years have had great six-week long, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. summer programs, but no one has ever become a part of the congregation through the program. Other congregations hold a one week Vacation Bible School and a couple of street fairs and have twenty new children in Sunday School in the fall, plus those children and their families coming to church.

What is the difference between the two congregations?

A major difference is whether or not EVANGELISM is an up front, stated objective of the summer program. If you want your congregation's program to bring in new people, then ask yourself: "Is our program intentionally designed to invite unchurched people to become part of the congregation?"

In general, a congregation which grows through its summer program is one in which the congregation is visible and present in the neighborhood which it is called to serve, and where the concerns of the people of the neighborhood are visible and where they are addressed in the worship and programming of the congregation.

The particulars of evangelism and outreach through summer programming are:

- ◆ RECRUIT
- ◆ INVOLVE
- ◆ TEACH
- ◆ INVITE
- ◆ WELCOME
- ◆ BE VISIBLE
- ◆ FOLLOW UP

Suggestions to help your congregation Recruit, Involve, Invite, Welcome, and Follow Up can be found on the next few pages.

RECRUIT

Recruiting new folks for the summer program requires making room in your program. If you have limited space and lots of children, this may mean some hard decisions. You may have to limit participation by "regulars" (for example, only the first 20 children who are already active in the congregation may sign up for the program) or you may have to hold two instead of one session.

Recruitment means intentionally going out and looking for new children. Do not expect the children to come and find you. There are many ways to find the children:

- Summer Program flyers can be delivered door-to-door, with a personal invitation to participate. For many congregations, this is a special opportunity to do initial calling - introduce yourself and your program.

- Street Fairs, where a little bit of Summer Program is brought right to a particular park, street or project, and can include an invitation to Day Camp.
- Some people have had good response from supermarket tear-off sheets.
- Others recruit through the schools.

There are many ways - can you think of some that might work in your community?

- Where do children play?
- Where do parents gather?

Recruitment should include asking children about their church affiliation. Ask for specifics - it's the only way to be sure of the nature of the child's involvement. Ask:

- "Have you been baptized?"
- "Do you go to Sunday School?"
- "Where?"
- "When were you last there?"
- "Who is your pastor?"

The aim is for children to be actively involved in a worshipping community. For a member of another church, your interest can lead to better participation in that person's own church. For an inactive or unchurched family, your interest can lead to church affiliation at your congregation.

INVOLVE

If I am a guest in your home and you ask me to help set the table, then I will feel less like a stranger and more like a part of your family. Summer program is a great opportunity to involve parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins and friends, because there is SO much to do!

Community input into the planning process is crucial. Parents, teachers, older siblings, neighbors - can be involved from the beginning in planning your program. They can be asked to serve on a planning committee; or a community/parents advisory committee. Or if you don't want to work with an official committee, then get together several people to consult with congregation members. Here are some questions you may ask:

- "What kind of program would you like to see happen?"
- "What do the children in this neighborhood need?"
- "Do you know people who could help with this?"

As a result of community input, you'll have a better program - and people will be more inclined to participate in a program they've helped to design.

Can you think of some people in your community who are not members of your congregation, whom you could ask for ideas?

During the program, you can ask for help:

- ask people to chaperone trips,
- to help serve lunch,
- to come to your closing picnic,
- to coach a sport or game activity,
- to contribute cookies,

- to help with the crafts,
- to play the guitar,
- to teach Spanish songs,
- anything and everything.

Such involvement helps people to feel valuable, welcome, and allows them to use their specific talents.

It also immeasurably enriches the program and gives you a chance to get to know these family members and friends of the children.

INVITE

If a new acquaintance says to you, "Stop over some time," without giving you her address or suggesting a particular time, are you likely to go? On the other hand, if she says, "Come for coffee on Tuesday at 3:00. Do you know where Avon Avenue is? If not, I'll come and pick you up at 2:45pm," then you will be far more likely to accept her invitation. The same is true about worship, as well as Day Camps.

Our congregations need to make repeated, specific invitations to be sure that every person knows of his or her welcome. Summer program provides all kind of opportunities for extending an invitation:

- Invite in person, when you make the first contact with the family - not just to summer program, but also to worship and to all the other activities of the congregation.
- A letter inviting each child and his or her family to come to worship can be sent to every participant. On Friday during Day Camp, a reminder about Sunday worship can be sent home with the children.
- You can advertise your program as a SUNDAY through FRIDAY program, and include Sunday worship as part of the "program."
- Sunday School teachers can take advantage of Day Camp by making an initial visit in August or September with new children who will be in their classes, introducing themselves to the family and welcoming the children to participation in Sunday School.

It is surprising who might come, *if invited*.

WELCOME

There are some specific ways of making summer program participants feel welcome at your church:

Teach and use music in the language and from the cultures of children who are in your summer program. Use these songs both in the program and in Sunday worship.

FOLLOW UP

What happens after your summer program to follow up and to nurture relationships that have sprouted is an essential part of your summer program.

Visit all participants immediately after the program to thank them for their participation.

Write a letter thanking people for their participation.

Visit again just before Sunday School starts in the fall, inviting the children and their families to participate in the life of your congregation.

Help arrange for people to get to church.

Schedule programs specifically designed to involve new people whom you have met through the summer program. Such programs serve as a bridge, allowing the summer program participant to enter into fuller involvement with the congregation.

"Follow up" programs might include baptism class, first holy communion class, new members and/or inquirers' class, Gospel Choir, Bible study, parenting groups, tutoring or after school clubs, youth group, art class, acolyte club, sports, Girl/Boy Scouts.

Involve the leadership of all exciting groups in preparing to welcome new people in the fall. Make room for newcomers. Have leaders think of specific programs to welcome new people, how to issue invitations, how to assimilate new members, etc.

Summer program and follow up programming are integral to the mission of the congregation. If you want them to work, don't treat them as expendable "extras." Instead, put funds for summer and follow up programming into your church budget.

Use official communication vehicles of the church (newsletter, bulletins) to carry articles announcing, interpreting and celebrating your program.

Publicly recognize teachers, coaches, cooks and bottle washers. Lift up positive examples from your program in sermons.

Write a news release for the local paper.

DAY CAMP EVANGELISM WORKSHEET

Recruit - How will we meet new children and their families?

Involve - How will we involve parents and others?

In planning:

In the program:

Teach - How will we prepare children to be part of the church?

Invite - How will we invite people to become part of our worshipping community?

Welcome - What will we change to make people welcome?

Be Visible - How will we let people in the community know about our congregation?
(What will we do in public? Where will we do it?)

Follow Up - What will we do to integrate new people we meet through the summer program into our congregational life?

DAY CAMP EVANGELISM FOLLOW-UP CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist as suggested ways to follow-up on evangelism contacts made with families having children enrolled in a day camp program. These are suggestions you may have other effective ways to pursue new leads as members.

1. Within the week after the program ends, send a personalized thank you to each participant. Include in the letter an invitation to Church Sunday School. If possible, have one of the Day Camp participants from your congregation deliver this note in person. Possibly have the Day Camp kids sing a song or do a skit for Rally Sunday during worship.
2. Two weeks after the day camp program ends - members of the evangelism committee or the pastor make personal contact with each family. Be sure to invite them as guests to such events as rally day or church picnics.
3. Phone or written contact can be made with each family a third time after the program has ended. (One contact is not enough. Professional marketing tells us we need to hear the message three to seven times!)
4. As soon as you have secured dates for the following year Day Camp, make personal contact with those new families to invite them to join you again. (Remember, repeated invitations are a good thing.)

It is important to see the Day Camp program as a tool in your congregation's outreach to the community. It is not the only answer to evangelism. Day Camp must be worked into an ongoing evangelism program.