

Teaching the Word at Summer Camps

by Sarah B. Odhner

Summer camps and family or teen weekends are a wonderful way to draw together a scattered group of children or families to learn about the Word. When the congregation is scattered, these can be the life-blood of the church.

Because of the informality of most camp settings and the length of time for lessons, camps are a great time to consider teaching something on a larger scale. You can choose a series of stories or a large concept and focus your camp around that. Plan an integrated day—mealtimes can be part of your activities, the need to cool off can be a chance to teach your class in the water (theme permitting), *etc.* You can also use the outdoors as your classroom. Here are a few children’s camp ideas that we have used.

Children of Israel Theme

If you choose the children of Israel, think on a big scale and teach the camp outdoors. Pick up your supplies, “leave Egypt” and wander as you teach the stories from the Word. Stop under different trees to read. (If it is winter, or too cold to go outside, wander around inside the building. Set up different teaching stations along the way.) If you have a large field, mark out the boundaries of a full-sized tabernacle using sticks (or dowels) and brightly colored yarn. Construct an Ark with the children from a cardboard box with cutout cherubim and spray paint it gold. Have everyone write the Ten Commandments on two “tablets” of cardboard, put them in the ark. As a final activity, plan a ceremony to represent the time the priests brought the ark into the holy of holies.

New Testament Theme

Many stories in the New Testament are centered around water. If you are lucky enough to have a camp near water, either a swimming pool or lake, plan some of your activities around that. Take the children out in a boat and talk about the Lord and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Get a large net and teach the children how the Israelites would have fished. (We once experimented with plastic fish.) Plan meals around what the Lord and his disciples might have eaten. Have a meal of loaves and fishes as you tell the story of the feeding of the 5000. Walk from “place to place” outside as you teach. Explore the geography of Canaan. Mark out a large map on a field with flags to show major cities, mountain ranges and bodies of water.

Stories of Daniel Theme

The stories of Daniel are long and very dramatic. They lend themselves to building and drama. Use sidewalk chalk to write the words of the hand on the wall. Eat healthy food at snack time (not the king’s food.) Make an image of clay like the one in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream—and smash it with a large rock of truth when you have

finished your enactment sound the instruments to call the people to worship the image, and be like Daniel and his friends—worship only the Lord. Act out Daniel in the lions’ den. Make a banner that shows what the statue in the dream meant (the 5 churches).

Book of Revelation, Holy City Theme

I once ran a one-day camp for children ages 2-5 (while their older brothers and sisters were learning about the tabernacle somewhere else). We used sticks as posts to mark the square city on our lawn, and took rolls of wallpaper (obtained free as they were out of print) and wrapped them around the sticks to make the walls. We took a roll of shiny blue wallpaper and made a river of life. We decorated a tree branch with plastic fruit for the tree of life and put it in the center of the city. The children had a wonderful time going in and out the gates of the city and eating lots of fruit.

The Story of Joseph

This beloved story lends itself to projects and drama. Each child can make a “special coat.” You can get men’s shirts at rummage sales or thrift shops, cut off the collars and cuffs, and decorate with paint, crayons or use potato stamps and dyes. Make clothes like the Egyptians for Joseph in Egypt. Use large plain white men’s T-shirts. Decorate by stamping patterns on to them (cut potatoes into Egyptian shapes). If you stamp in bright colors around the neck, the effect is like an Egyptian necklace. Wear with a belt. You can make a wagon into a chariot by decorating the sides with cardboard spray painted gold. Show how important Joseph became in Egypt. Assign each child a name of a brother. (Practice standing in order to remember their birth order.) After the brothers come to Egypt, act out the story. Fill sacks (bags) with sand from a sandbox and hide the money in each man’s sack. Have the children go back home, be pursued and searched, and find the “money” in the sacks. Get a metal goblet (or plastic one) and hide it in Benjamin’s sack. Have an Egyptian meal. Seat all the brothers in order of age. “Joseph” reveals himself.

Camp Traditions—Building Memories and Continuity

When the flock is scattered and camps are held annually, it helps to develop camp traditions. In Oregon, USA, the children make a camp banner each year showing the theme of the camp. Banners are brought back to camp and displayed each year. They children have fun remembering what they learned.

Camp songs can reinforce learning and provide a sense of community and fun. Use an existing song and make up new camp words. Sing them at mealtimes, after vespers, *etc.* At the British Academy Summer School in England, we had several songs that lasted at camp for years. People sometimes made up new verses every day. One camp I attended had a goodbye song and ritual for the end of every camp.

Choose a camp name. “Winding Waters,” “Pineneedle,” “Summer School,” “Laurel,” “Pokagon,” and “Jacob’s Creek” are the names of just a few New Church camps.

Get lots of help. You will need it! The more people that are involved in planning and helping teach, provide food, *etc.*, the more people will leave with full hearts and wonderful memories. They will also have lots of good ideas.