

Summer Ministry Thoughts...

Get Students to Church Camp!

I know summer is already here, but you still have time to get the students in your congregation to attend summer camp. Here are some of the reasons why is so important:

- 1) Students need time away to hear the voice of God. Schedules are busy and getting away for a few days with an eternal perspective can be have transforming power in the life of a high school student.
- 2) Memories are built - if you want to build memories for the rest of the school year, go to camp. The opportunities for fun and growth as a group are endless. Nicknames, classic stories and jokes that live on forever often begin at camp. Think about it - a week of camp is equivalent to nearly two years of weekly Sunday school (if you figure five or six days of camp with about 16 hours each day). Not that camp takes the place of Sunday School, but it is such a valuable addition to faith formation.
- 3) Relationships are formed - Camp gives students opportunities to build relationships with peers and leaders in faith. Many times it gives students opportunities to serve and lead within the church
- 4) The gospel message is received with fresh ears - so often, students need to hear a different person share the same message. There is a distinct difference between discipleship and evangelism. The local church ministry disciples students year and year out. Camp allows students to hear (or be reminded of) the foundation of the gospel message and experience the power in it.
- 5) Lives are changed. I have seen it hundreds of times. I have heard it in hundreds of testimonies. And I was one of those kids whose life was changed during camp. You might have been too. I know that there many vehicles to proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ and that camp is just one of them. And in a few decades, it might be something else. But for now, it's still a good one. Make it a priority. Get people involved. Encourage, help raise money, take part in leadership, and do whatever you can to get your kids to camp!

Ideas for Camping Ministry Leaders

- Keep camp fresh this summer - take a risk and try new things. Sometimes we just need to be told to "be creative". Figure out some new fresh ways of getting students engaged and excited.

- Much like church planters, camping ministry directors (either permanent site directors or week long volunteer deans) must find ways to fund their mission. Dream big about how you can engage students and help them experience the love of God through worship, serving and learning. Then, figure out ways to fund those dreams. Don't allow the budget to narrow the opportunities. If you are the person in charge of making it happen, send out letters to churches. Send letters to friends and family and let them know what you are doing and what your vision is. Send requests and applications through the denominational chain of command. If you are able (or even if you may not be), dig into your own pockets. Do what you can to help create in powerful and memorable ways the right conditions for students to experience Christ in their midst.

- Focus on traditions - sounding contradictory to "keeping things fresh" a simple tradition can be a very inexpensive way of connecting with kids year after year. We have been to camps where there is a ritual as kids come into camp, or enter the dining hall. Maybe it's something during the last night. Whatever it is, focus on it. Keep it going and hype it up. "As you know, here at Camp _____, we have always _____". For all the kids who have been here before, what do you think... should we do it again this year? There's always a wild applause.

- Start a facebook group and get people to follow on twitter.
- Give something to students as they leave camp. It might be as simple as a piece of paper with the bible verse and a wrap up of the theme. Doesn't have to cost much, but something as they are leaving to say, "Thanks for being here this week! We are glad you took time out of your schedule to be at camp."
- Set high standards early in the week and then you can relax and grow with kids. Building a tall fence of discipline in the beginning can make things so much better during the week. On the contrary, being "a friend" too quickly and making the fence too low adds pressure and stress later in the week. As they say to new teachers, "don't smile until December," In a loving way, be firm up front and that really does allow the freedom for ministry and relationships in the long run and throughout the week of camp.
- Print t-shirts with the camp name and wear one every day.
- Get a banner for your worship space, entrance to camp or dining hall - www.superiorbillboardimages.com.

Make the most of Summer Youth Ministry!

Invite your group (or break up your group into segments if needed) into your home for hotdogs, chips and games some evening. Nothing fancy, short notice works too... just have them over. Also, invite a few adults who might be interested in helping with the youth ministry in the fall. Building memories with them during those times will be great.

Maybe you can't make it to a week of camp with your group this year, but what about hosting a three-four day event on your own or with another church. Find a place to meet (a tent camping site, a local church campground, another local church within an hours drive or a motel) and set up a time focused on hearing God's voice with your students.

Set up a schedule centered around the theme of carving out time for fellowship and communion with God. Include things like individual morning devotions and quiet reflection, group devotions or message, worship time (either bringing in people to lead in worship with your group or utilizing a worship leader from your church or community) and time to pray.

Summer Sundays are a great time for fun... after youth group some night go out for ice cream or for miniature golf. Not having school on Monday will make this a fun filled night.

Host an ice cream social or watermelon fest for your entire congregation. Meet at the park, sing some songs (optional), do a couple skits from the youth group (purely for entertainment value), and sit around and have fun with the church!

Do some praying, planning and marketing for the fall. Summer time is a great few weeks to get the fall in high gear. Have postcards ready with major school year dates. Have registration information and other details about weekend conferences and ministry schedule. Plan some of the topics and teaching times. Host a back to school event in your church or community. With a large vision, secure some money from your church board or individual givers and make a splash in the community.

If you aren't doing a mission trip, invite your students who take part in a day of serving locally. Pray for and research a place your group can go and get their hands dirty in the name of Jesus.