

Small Church - Big Mission

Clarkes United Methodist Church shares its ideas for getting all their kids to camp (adults, too?)

by Sue Dumolt

We started out a little over twenty years ago when someone in the church offered to pay for two kids to go to camp so they could see how much fun camp can be. They came back all excited about camp and we have sent 12 - 20 campers most years since then. We are a very small Church, so that is most of our children. We earn camp money by recycling newspapers, interest from campership investments, and the fantastic support of our UMW. I know that some of our families have been drawn to our church because of this very visible support of children.

Basically, the children "earn" scholarships to camp. A large poster is made every February outlining all of the details. There is space for each child's name and boxes to mark as they earn their points. Between February and May our kids earn points in three categories:

(1) Attendance points: They must come to Sunday School at least 7 times during those four months and therefore earn at least 7 points in that category.

(2) Sharing God's love points: They spend an hour "sharing God's love" by doing nice things for other people to earn one point. They must earn at least 7 points in this category. This one is a little tricky, because different families interpret it differently. The most appreciated way to earn these points seems to be to help Mom or Dad, without complaining, with chores around the house. It is commonly observed that they cannot get points for doing their daily chores, cleaning their own rooms, or anything they get paid to do. They need to do some extra nice things. I try to encourage community service, but some families do much more of that than others. We also give 1/4 points for jobs like being an Acolyte at church, which takes about 15 minutes, etc.

(3) Learning about God's Love: They spend an hour learning more about God's love for each point and must earn 7 points in this category, also. This is outside of Sunday School. They can read the Bible or other religious books, or memorize Bible verses. (Beware of Genesis 1:1 being "memorized" more than one time!!) They can also earn points by telling me about the Pastor's sermon from that day in Church, adjusted for detail according to their age. It is amazing how they start listening to sermons during the Spring!

Once they earn their 21 points they are awarded a scholarship. The scholarship will pay for an average one- week camp, less \$100 which the family pays, but no family pays more than \$100 (so if they have 4 children they only pay \$25 per child for a total of \$100). They often choose to pay extra to go to Horse camp at

Wallowa Lake Camp, but it allows many of them to go to Horse camp which they couldn't afford otherwise. It also only pays the least expensive level, so they need to sign up by May 5th or pay the extra. We make it very clear that we want children to go to camp, so any child who needs a full scholarship receives one without questions.

The enthusiasm for camping has overflowed from the children to the adults. We don't have adults going to camp (yet!), but we have adopted cabin #9 over at Suttle Lake Camp and fixed it up, had Church Retreats over at Suttle Lake and worked around the camp, and supplied the full volunteer staff for Nature Detectives Camp last year.

Camp & Retreat Ministry thanks the people of Clarke's UMC for sharing their campership strategy with us!