



# Program manual for Creation Vacation



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## INTRODUCTION: WHY CREATION VACATION?

1995 the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church issued a resolution that began an initiative across the church with three objectives in mind:

- (1) to reshape The United Methodist Church in response to the God who is among “the least of these”;
- (2) to provide resources for understanding the crises among children and the impoverished and enable the church to respond to them; and
- (3) to proclaim in word and deed the gospel of God’s redeeming, reconciling, and transforming grace in Jesus Christ to and with the children and those oppressed by poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Ann Sherer, writing as chair of the Task Force, stated:

This initiative is not a program or an emphasis but an invitation to the church to reorder our priorities and to evaluate our life and mission in light of the impact on children and the impoverished. We want our daily life and work shaped by this vehicle of grace. Such radical change is not easy. Yet we envision leaders and communities of faith experiencing God’s grace as they choose to live in community with the most vulnerable. We become a new and more vital community when the resources of the impoverished and the affluent come together. Our biblical and theological reflection has greater depth and integrity. We have a closer picture of reality when those who are affluent study Scriptures with those who work two minimum salary jobs just to eat and have a roof overhead. This guide moves us prayerfully into such conversations, actions, and relationships.<sup>2</sup>

When the Oregon-Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church tried to align its family camping programs with this initiative, the conversations, actions and relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Task Force for the Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, *Community with Children and the Poor* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2003), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,5-6.

that were started became “Creation Vacation”. Community and relationships are central to camp experiences, just as they are at the center of the study guide for the Bishops’ Initiative. An initiative is defined in their guidebook as “a teaching movement that calls the church to study and to action.”<sup>3</sup> Camps can have a great role in that movement – especially as people learn by acting. Both the evangelistic and prophetic roles of the Bishops, speaking out in this Initiative, can come alive in the experience of the churches through their efforts in camping ministries.

The goal of reshaping the church proved the most difficult of the three goals set forth, and led to the Bishops’ renewing the Initiative in 2000 for another quadrennium. We were urged to go deeper. What does it mean to reshape the church? The guide provides a question that should be asked of any action or plan of any church:

...every time we conduct worship, approve a church budget, organize a youth event, plan vacation Bible school, or build a church addition, the first question we ask is, “What will be the impact of these actions on children and on the poor?” It also means that if our answer to that question is, “It won’t have any effect,” or “It will create a barrier that will impede our ability to be in relationship with the poor or children,” then we need to reconsider whether it is a faithful action.<sup>4</sup>

This manual grows from the churches’ need to go deeper with Creation Vacation camp experiences –preparing Family Friends both for camp and for changes back home. It is the hope of all involved that not only the low-income camp participants and the middle class church volunteers will know positive changes in their own lives after camp, but that through them, God will be at work transforming and reshaping congregations and communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,10.

## REMEMBERING OUR HERITAGE

The work we do to align camping ministries with the Bishops' Initiative on Community with Children and the Poor is consistent with the desire to celebrate and recover some of the uniqueness of our heritage. John Wesley is remembered to have held unique views for his time which we may find instructive and powerful today. When Wesley looked at the face of poverty in his time, he responded and taught that direct contact with persons who are poor is a means of grace. He also emphasized the necessity for the all, including the poor, to be able to give as well as receive. John Wesley also had a remarkable interest in science and the natural world. We can learn from all these aspects of his teaching and example.

Richard Heitzenrater, in his volume entitled *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, summarizes the important differences in Wesley's understanding and approach to social class distinctions from others of his time. For instance, instead of a quantifying a level of wealth or poverty, Wesley defined social class in relative terms –in relation to the necessities of life. Did people have sufficient, decent, and adequate food, housing and clothing? If the answer was “no” –that person was poor. If the answer was “yes”, than possessing anything beyond that made one rich in his eyes.<sup>5</sup> “Whoever has

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 27-29.

sufficient food to eat and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, is *rich*.” (Sermon 87, “*The Danger of Riches*”, I.1, *Works*, 3:230)<sup>6</sup>

Wesley’s approaches to people in poverty were distinctive for his time. Instead of criminalizing poverty, Wesley worked from these perspectives:

- A *communal* approach –people were expected to help each other in the community of faith locally and connectionally.
- An *inclusive* community –composed of all the people, without distinction of class.
- A *relative* rather than standard measure of poverty or riches –for instance, was the item you desire a superfluous purchase, a convenience, a necessity, or something without which you would be destitute.
- A *universal* approach to charity –everyone could give something to someone in more need than themselves.
- A *theological* approach –meet the needs of the poor in order to imitate the life of Christ, not to improve the national economy. We are all poor in some way or another –no stigma to be economically poor. He tried to break the barriers that caused or perpetuated economic poverty for some.<sup>7</sup>

Wesley’s teaching and example held together works of mercy and works of piety as means of grace. Works of mercy lead us to deeper knowledge of God as they provide transforming encounters by the love of God. Randy Maddox says it this way:

We do not engage in works of mercy just because we “feel like it” or only when we feel like it, nor do we engage in them only because it is what God commands or because it helps others. We are encouraged to engage in works of mercy because God has graciously designed this engagement to have an empowering and formative impact on us.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 75.

Some will ask why we offer Creation Vacation. Is it an attempt to proselytize others? We can respond with a solid foundation in our Wesleyan heritage that we offer this (and other ministries) as Christ did –to all who are in need and simply because of their need. Wesley did not overlook the possible positive evangelistic impact resulting from Christian engagement in such open-ended works of mercy. But the specific potential effect that he highlighted was not the enticement of uncommitted people to embrace the Christian faith by addressing their physical needs. Rather, he hoped to overcome the widespread crisis of credibility of Christian witness through the increased number of Christians who would model authentic loving care for others. Wesley considered the failure of most Christians to imitate Christ-like sharing with those in need to be the grand stumbling block that prevented other groups from taking Christian evangelistic efforts seriously.<sup>9</sup>

Wesley’s involvement with the poor of his time and his instruction for all to be directly involved seems to spring from an intensely practical point of view to which many of us relate. He urged “Not simply *service of* the poor, but more importantly *life with* the poor”.<sup>10</sup> There was no substitute for first-hand knowledge.

One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it – and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart. (Wesley Sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick”, I,3, Works 3:387-88)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 190.

What else do we learn from studying our Wesleyan heritage? In the area of what we today would call environmental stewardship, we might be amazed to know that John Wesley wrote a five volume set –*A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*—with topics ranging from the human body to plant and animal kingdoms, the solar system and composition of our planet, and how all creatures are able to live together, each in their own niche within the overall plan of the Creator.<sup>12</sup> Theodore Runyon in his book, *New Creation*, notes that Wesley considered even seeming small and insignificant elements of nature to have a rightful place ( what we would now call a sense of ecological balance), through which we would better understand ourselves. Here are two quotes of interest to give a sense of Wesley’s reasoning:

Understanding ourselves within the context of the natural world and in relationship to the rest of creation we find our place in *the family of nature*. (preface to the American edition of *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*)

By thus acquainting and familiarizing ourselves with the works of nature, we become as it were a member of her family, a participant in her felicities; but while we remain ignorant, we are like strangers and sojourners in a foreign land, unknowing and unknown. (*Survey* 1: viii)<sup>13</sup>

It is into this unique heritage that we step by choosing involvement with Creation Vacation ministries. Is it possible that a deeper understanding of our unique Wesleyan heritage may assist us and our congregations to find effective ways forward in meeting the challenges of our day?

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<sup>12</sup> Runyon, Theodore, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 201.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 201,202.

## THE PROGRAM DESIGN OF CREATION VACATION

- *Creation Vacation strengthens families.*

Families have a respite from the stresses of daily living in poverty. Most of the families make heroic daily efforts to preserve their families. However, because of their inadequate financial resources, this can result in extraordinary stress. The change of scene and benefits of the Creation Vacation program are critical to reflecting and making decisions to improve their family life back home.

Families have unstructured time together with relatively few demands. Families get quality family time. There are no TVs, no phones and no worries about meeting their needs for that day. Families get the chance to be at their best with each other and to rediscover their common worth and the reasons they love and value each other. Adults and children both experience improved self-esteem.

Families get extraordinary support and positive modeling for relationship building.

Families benefit from the unconditional acceptance of their Family Friends. Family Friends listen well and provide helpful insights. Children play in an environment where respect, kindness and fun are the norms. Families benefit from positive modeling of relationships.

Families build positive memories which can provide hope and direction back home.

Throughout the year, parents and children draw from the benefits of these few days of vacation. Family routines change to provide more time together. Family attitudes change to expect loving and caring behavior from each other. Family schedules change to make it possible to get some refreshing time out together.

*“We are closer now, more like a family. We are connected once again. We still sing the silly camp songs, share the memories, enjoy the pictures, check the sea shells from time to time to see if we brought home any ‘sea creatures’, and keep a watchful eye on the bird house now in our backyard, hoping that, Mommy and Daddy Bird make a family just like ours.”*

*“I’m happy because they help us learn how to be kind to our family.”*

*– 7-year-old camper*

- *Creation Vacation builds society among families.*

Families develop relationships with neighbors and overcome the isolation they feel.

Families from common geographical areas attend Creation Vacation together. At pre-camp meetings, agreements are reached on things like how we are going to talk with one another’s children, what rules we should pay attention to, how everyone would like to be treated. Through common meals and recreational activities, families get to know one another. There are also activities specifically geared for community building. These include sing-a-longs, sharing times and evening campfires. In follow-up evaluations, families rate this as an important benefit.

*“My kids got to know some more friends and they are trying to keep those friendships. I got to meet more families in my neighborhoods and stay in touch with them.”*

*Creative Vacation provides a safe environment for families.*

Creation Vacation is held at several of the camp and retreat facilities operated by the United Methodist Church in Oregon-Idaho Conference. The camps are used by thousands of individuals each year. They are accredited as meeting the safety and operational standards of the American Camp Association. Volunteers who assist with camp programs must meet screening, training and qualifying standards.

Families are well-sheltered and kept warm. Lodging is provided in a variety of heated lodges and cabins. Some have self-contained bathroom facilities and others are near shower-houses. Rooms are chosen for each family appropriate to their needs. Many families do not have sleeping bags, therefore, warm sleeping bags are loaned to every person who doesn't have one.

Families are well-fed. Meals are served family-style at tables in the main lodge of each camp. Three nutritious meals and snacks are provided. Camp staffs have noted that a considerably greater amount of food is eaten than by other camp groups. These families regularly experience hunger and at camp have the opportunity for "all you can eat". Not having to worry about providing food, or deciding who gets to eat, is consistently rated by parents and children alike as one of the strong points of camp. Older children and adults assist with table setting and dish washing.

Families are provided safe transportation. Few of the participants have cars, or at least not ones capable of a family trip to the coast or the mountains. Transportation to and from camp is provided on buses and vans rented from accredited commercial transportation

services. Young children are required to use car seats. Accommodations are made for wheelchairs.

Families follow clear expectations for positive behavior. Creation Vacation families are expected to respect themselves and others, to treat one another with care, and to refrain from hateful words or physical attacks. There is zero tolerance at camp sites for weapons, alcohol or non-prescribed drugs.

*“My most memorable happening is the feeling of complete security for my girls that I get when I get off the bus at camp”*

- *Creation Vacation provides a supportive environment for families*

Each family has links to social work help and resources back home. Social work staff at agencies serving these families screen for those with the greatest need and who would benefit the most from the experience. They make individual contacts with each family to prepare them for their vacation and to identify any special needs. Families attend orientation meetings in their communities to clarify the event and expectations, and to get input on activities that will be offered. In addition, social work staffpersons who accompany the families to camp gain new insights on strengths and needs, as well as improved relationships as they share recreation and meals and see the family under different circumstances.

Each family has a “Family Friend”. Family Friends are volunteers who assist families with orientation to the camp, with childcare, and with recreation activities. Family Friends are carefully screened and then trained on how to help each family have the best

possible experience at Creation Vacation and to take home clear benefits from their vacation.

Each family benefits from experienced camp program staff. Each site is directed by a camp ministry professional, assisted by a team of persons in various roles from housekeeping and food service to lifeguards and program specialists.

*“My family came away with new friends. I had a chance to get to know the Family Stabilization coordinator, and I feel more comfortable allowing my children to participate. I know personally we love our Family Friend. I would have to say the community was affected by these positive attitudes.”*

- *Creation Vacation provides a serene and stimulating environment for families.*

Families benefit from being out of the city and in a beautiful natural landscape. The majestic surroundings of mountain or coastline provide families with an enjoyable and relaxing setting. Parents are able to gain some perspective on the stresses of their everyday lives. Children are able to build special memories that may stand out as the most memorable of their childhoods. In addition, both adults and children gain a greater appreciation for the natural world and the importance of treating all living things with respect and care.

Families benefit from a wide variety of recreational activities. Families may participate in structured activities or simply relax and play together. Recreation options at Camp Magruder include beach play and sand sculptures, swimming, fishing and boating at Smith Lake, donkey rides, archery, basketball, volleyball, and a children’s play area. Sawtooth and Wallowa Lake Camps also offers a variety of hiking and recreation options

onsite and in adjacent areas. Crafts may include tie dye, nature art, birdhouses, and kites. Many of the activities are first time opportunities for the campers. Some popular activities are suggested by participants. These have included everything from volleyball tournaments to salsa-making contests. Ideas from Cooperative Extension agents for having fun making nutritious food together as families have proven popular. We've tried ice-cream making in plastic bags, and picking berries in season and baking muffins with them.

*“I think that the benefits we got were being able to see the beauty of nature together as a family and being able to see my son have the time of his life.”*

- *Creation Vacation makes a concrete difference in families' lives.*

Here are some more of the things families are saying about their experiences at Creation Vacation –

- *“It was a special gift for my family to leave behind all our cares. We didn't have to worry about financial stress. I didn't have to cook or chase after kids. We had many experiences we normally would not have had.”*
- *“I have been able to watch how other families treat each other and applied it to my family. Thank you.”*
- *“It was a good time for us. We needed to get away together to be a family unit doing things together. The whole trip was really fun!”*
- *“It relieved stress to get away from home to a beautiful place and spend time together.”*
- *“We who went to camp have good memories! We often talk about it.”*
- *“It gave us valuable time together. No TV, no phones, no newspapers, no transportation. There was plenty to do together as a family. Talking, ping pong, basketball, walks on the beach, boating, opportunities to laugh a lot. Meals together are rare nowadays. All added to this wonderful memory making experience.”*
- *“I got to meet more people from the local area. It relieved stress.”*
- *“Most memorable was being together at the beach and on walks. Our family now does more together and shares things more often. I learned to communicate better with my husband.”*

- *"I got to know some other families a bit better. Transportation is key. Old cars or no cars means a lot of people cannot take vacations normally. Thanks again."*
- *"Being together for 3 days as a family really helped us bond better as a family."*
- *"My most memorable experience was when my son was on the beach for the first time. We eat all together now."*
- *"Creation Vacation made us closer as a family and it now feels more comfortable talking to our neighbors."*
- *"At Creation Vacation you could enjoy the outdoors without having to worry about anything."*
- *"The two things I enjoyed most were sharing the sunset with my daughter and watching the stars come out at night. As a result of the Creation Vacation experience, I'm more careful how I express myself to my children. It renewed my sense of awe in the natural beauty which surrounds us."*
- *From a 10 year old – "I benefited by seeing other families love and care for each other. Where else except nature would a squirrel go into your room and steal a candy bar from your bag?"*

- *Creation Vacation provides positive and measurable outcomes for families.*

Portland State University staff has conducted an outcomes study based on interviews of family friends and families during and following 2000 events. It was published in the American Camping Association Journal, Camping Magazine, in the May/June 2002 issue. Outcomes associated with a natural setting and outdoor activities, for family relationships, and for benefits to the community were examined and were found to be positive. The concluding sentences of the study state:

[Creation Vacation camps] appear to produce positive outcomes that *continue* after that experience. This is less true of other types of program interventions (Neill, 2002). In this small-scale study, families reported several positive outcomes that had continued five months later.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ann Fullerton and Ted Hulbert, Paul Pierson, Jennifer Waldorf, and Annie Calhoun, "Creation Vacation Brings Low-Income Families to Camp," *Camping Magazine* 75, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 46.

Creation Vacation has received much professional recognition and community support throughout the years. In Summer 1999, the National Camp and Outdoor Retreat Committee of the United Methodist Church, the denomination's national camping organization, published an article about Creation Vacation in its national newsletter Camp/Retreat Memo under the heading "Cutting Edge Ministries That Are Working". In October 1999, Creation Vacation was awarded the "Champions for Children" civic award from Janus Youth Programs of Portland. In October 2000, Creation Vacation was awarded the "Phyllis M. Ford Award for Creative Programming" by the American Camp Association, Oregon Trail Section.

## THE FAMILIES OF CREATION VACATION

The families participating in Creation Vacation are extremely low-income. This means that they do not have sufficient income to meet the basic needs of their families for shelter, food, heat and childcare. Most extremely low-income families are employed, but are still living in poverty.

Many families served by Creation Vacation live in subsidized housing programs where families pay 30% of their income for housing. However, because of the extremely limited and inadequate supply of subsidized housing, most low-income families in Idaho and Oregon are paying the vast majority of their income for housing in the private market. Creation Vacation serves these families.

Oregon has for several years had the highest rate of child hunger in the nation. Many low-income families receive food stamps which cover only part of the cost of food for a month. Food box pantries where families can get a sack of groceries are not able to meet their remaining nutritional needs. By the end of the month, low-income families are hungry. These are the families Creation Vacation serves.

Programs to assist low-income families with childcare expenses are extremely limited and inadequately funded. Few families can access them. As most low-income families are employed at least part-time (at very low wages), childcare is a necessity. These are the families Creation Vacation serves.

Extremely low-income families are under extraordinary pressure as they attempt to meet their families' needs with inadequate resources. As can be expected, these families report experiencing considerable financial stress as their paychecks must try to do the impossible. For some families there remains little time or energy for focusing on family relationships or for building community with neighbors. Feelings of isolation only contribute to stress –working parents often feel that they are going it alone and that the struggle is unending.

Extremely low-income families have exactly \$0 for recreation activities. Activities away from the stresses of work and home are what are required for renewal to improve family and community relationships. Such activities are what cannot be afforded because there is not enough money for daily necessities. Families in poverty have no opportunities for vacation. They have no respite from the constant reminders of empty cupboards, empty gas tanks and empty pocketbooks.

All families can testify to the benefits of a week away from the city and in the out of doors. You can imagine how significant these days can be for families where children have never been out of the city, have never been in wild and natural settings and have never had time with their families where basic needs were met.

## SELECTION OF FAMILY PARTICIPANTS

Most churches have found it extremely helpful to work in collaboration with a social service agency, housing authority, or other existing program that serves low-income families in their community. Sometimes, connections began with church members who are social workers or employed by community agencies. Successful collaborations have been established with groups such as the YWCA, transitional housing providers, domestic violence shelters, Healthy Start/Head Start, city housing authorities, youth-serving agencies within housing projects, community action agencies, and neighborhood associations.

One caution from experience: it is not advisable to seek out partnerships with those serving homeless families. We have found that Creation Vacation experiences are not well-suited to serve families in the crisis time of homelessness. There is nothing worse than returning from camp and not having a place to drop off the family from the bus because their place in line at any particular agency or shelter has been lost while they were away. A family needs to be more secure than that to best participate in what Creation Vacation offers.

Many agencies have found it mutually advantageous to the client and the case manager to make completion of some requirement (parenting class, drug rehab, budgeting plan or education goals set) the criteria for eligibility for Creation Vacation

participation. Motivation stays high, and the parent can provide a wonderful experience for the whole family through their hard work and success one goal at a time.

When the case manager or child/parent advocate or other agency staff member can also come to camp, they have reaped great rewards as well. They see the family in a new context, are often able to spot dynamics not obvious in a counseling session, observe coping mechanisms and strengths at camp that can then be built upon back home. Sometimes even an agency board member has been recruited to come along to camp as a Family Friend to broaden their activity and understanding of the families and situations the agency serves.

Once families have attended a session of Creation Vacation, most planners consider them eligible to attend again, but give the first notice of camp to new families. About a month after recruiting new families, returning families are contacted to fill in until the capacity is reached. A mixture of new and returning families seems to work just fine at camp.

Once a family has attended 3 years, in order to continue to extend this program to more families, it seems helpful to determine other options for them to consider. One of those is to be staff for another session of Creation Vacation. This is especially possible and desirable if they have suitable skills and personality to translate for other participants, to be a Family Friend, or to organize a popular activity. So far, this transition from camper to staff person has worked very well for at least 4 families, and one young adult. (Sometimes it works the other way, too –when we realized the bus driver for camp could benefit by becoming a camper family!)

Another possibility is for the family or the children in a family to be encouraged and assisted to attend any of our other camp events. They can return to the site they are familiar with for any number of other programs that could be pre-selected so that leaders know there will be Creation Vacation “alumni” participating and can offer some transitional support. We are still working on ways to make this happen. One idea is to design a card that could be filled out by the Family Friend following Creation Vacation camp on which they could give the names and recommendation of children or families who would best be served by being encouraged to attend a “regular” camp as their next step. Then, appropriate communication and aid could be offered back home which would help them make that transition.

## PRE- AND POST-CAMP MEETINGS

Pre-camp meetings are very important. The first of these is likely to be an information session for eligible families to think about participating. Camp pictures, DVDs, and resource persons from the campsites are available to help with questions and answers. Another session is well-focused around hopes for camp, including how we want to interact with others, what rules we can mutually agree upon for supervision and safety of children, what balance of activity or rest is desirable. Health forms as well as family registration information forms are helpful to be completed at this point.

A final session will likely deal with logistics: bus transportation times and pick-up points, what to bring, what is not needed to bring, what is at camp that is to borrow (sleeping bags and liners, bicycles at Sawtooth for trail-riding), and what will be given to each family at camp but also to take home (a single-use camera, craft projects, water bottle, crib quilt, backpack with school supplies –as these items are available –varies from site to site and session to session as locally planned).

There has been some requests in past event evaluations from both families and Family Friends, for an opportunity to meet each other before camp. This might happen at the final pre-camp meeting, or it might be that an additional time can be created –maybe an ice cream social or simple supper before the final pre-camp meeting.

Some groups are planning ahead for post-camp meetings as well. Some of the most well-received post-camp occasions have been reunion times when photos taken at camp

can be given to the families (where one-hour development while at camp is impossible).

Some churches have made sure to hold reunions close to the time when Vacation Bible School or Sunday School sign-up can also take place. Back-to-school, Thanksgiving, and other seasonal occasions provide natural invitational times, but it's also always possible to declare an ice cream celebration or hot dog roast any old time at all! What would you like to do next with the friendships that have started at camp?

WORKS CITED AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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APPENDIX A

MYTHS VS. REALITY OF POVERTY IN OREGON AND IDAHO

**Myth:** Welfare causes poverty.

**Fact:** Most people who are poor do not receive cash assistance from the government. According to updated information from the Oregon Department of Human Service, less than 12% of the more than 400,000 Oregonians in poverty today receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families payments.

**Myth:** Welfare is a result of having too many children.

**Fact:** The average size of poor families is about the same as the average non-poor family, and family size has been going down. Studies show little evidence of a link between higher welfare benefits and having more children.

**Myth:** People can't be hungry in Oregon when we have an obesity problem.

**Fact:** 12.6% of Oregon households were food insecure. 5.8% were hungry.

**Myth:** If people just got a job, they wouldn't be hungry or homeless.

**Fact:** Oregon Center for Public Policy analysis states that one in seven working adults in Oregon lived in food insecure households during 2002. The majority of Oregonians in poverty work. At least one parent works in almost 70% of poor families with children.

**Myth:** Only homeless, jobless people need emergency food.

**Fact:** Food banks and emergency food providers continue to serve more working poor families than ever.

**Myth:** Most poor are single mothers and their children.

**Fact:** 38% of single mothers in the United States live in poverty while 34% in poverty live in two adult households.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Community Services Consortium Serving Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties, *Facts & Myths about people who are close to, or are already living in poverty* (Corvallis, OR: CSC, 2004), 3, 9-10.

## APPENDIX B

### SIX PRINCIPLES OF MENTORING THAT APPLY TO BEING A FAMILY FRIEND

1. Be a friend. To be effective it is important to build a relationship with the members of the family. Everything will go better if you take time to nurture a friendship.
2. Be supportive. Often all the family members need someone who believes in them and you can give great encouragement to all.
3. Be flexible. Enter into the relationship being curious about what this family might like to experience. You may not do what you thought you'd be doing as a Family Friend, in the beginning, or maybe ever.
4. Ask first. Before you decide to do anything with or for the family members, make sure it is what they want/need, and that they would like your help.
5. Be a resource or find one. You may be able to find or get something at camp or back home that the family cannot access on their own. (But don't forget #4.)
6. Leave enforcement of program requirements up to the staff, and discipline of children up to the parent. It is not your role to have to be a police person, but everyone needs to intervene in situations of safety. <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Silver Springs Interfaith Housing Coalition Program Committee, "Welcome to Mentoring with SSIHC" (Silver Springs, MD: SSIHC, 2004, photocopied), 8.

## APPENDIX C

### CHARACTERISTICS YOU MIGHT SEE IN PARTICIPANTS

- Tremendous survival skills –look for strengths rather than finding faults.
- Using story-telling to explain situations. It is very important to listen to these stories without interrupting them.
- Life is often lived as a series of one crisis following another. Camp may be a chance to have a break from all that.
- Many persons were abused or neglected in childhood, or had to grow up fast and take on adult roles very early. Many things we associate with children having fun at camp may be new experiences for the adults as well –enjoy those things together.
- Often there is vacillation between wanting help and not wanting help, between wanting independence and being dependent.
- Many persons expect to be criticized no matter what they do. Your expressions of support and acceptance can be a big surprise and delight.
- Many families place a high value on respect and are very sensitive to disrespect.

- Sometimes there is a difference in the notion of time based on experiences in different cultures and a different system here at camp (being on time for meals is expected at camp, for instance, and bed times seem too early).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Silver Springs Interfaith Housing Coalition Program Committee, "Welcome to Mentoring with SSIHC" (Silver Springs, MD: SSIHC, 2004, photocopied), 4.

## APPENDIX D

### YOUR ROLE AS A FAMILY FRIEND

#### **Relationship Building**

1. Doing things *with* the family is your entrée to positive and lasting relationships.
2. It is most important to LISTEN and learn about the family's reality, hopes and dreams.
3. Giving advice is generally not well-received, especially as you initially meet. It is much better to model responses and behaviors desired than to try to instruct, and it's never your job to give advice about how to live or deal with a problem. You *can* share alternatives that may occur to you.
4. Regular contact and communication on your part is important. Families rarely reach out to you if this is the first time they've ever experienced being "assigned" a friend! They often have been disappointed when they did reach out in the past, or don't have the social skills. You need to reach out to them.
5. If you think there is a problem with your relationship, first look at your part of the connection. Ask yourself if there is something concrete you can do to help or enrich their experience at camp. Also, consult with the camp dean or other camp staff person who can help you in the area of relationship-building. Sometimes an insight from someone else can get us steered in the right direction.

#### **Providing Support**

1. Encourage the adults in the family as well as the children. Many of these parents have not been encouraged very much, nor have they had opportunities to do some of the camp activities that we usually think of as children's fun. Let everyone try things –archery, hiking, boating, roasting a marshmallow at campfire time. Don't assume anything! It's often a first-time experience for the adult as well as for the child.
2. Tell the adults that you believe they can do what they are trying to do positively for and with their families. Identify talents and skills that they could contribute to the life of the whole camp.

3. You can bolster someone's self-esteem by showing that you care about them.<sup>18</sup>

### **What is NOT a Family Friend's responsibility?**

1. Enforcement –the family you are working with at camp may be part of another program at home that requires progress on specific goals –we're not responsible for enforcing compliance; we can offer friendly support. Remember, lots of changes people would like to see in their lives take a nurturing, safe relationship and time.
2. Evaluation –it is not your job to evaluate a family's progress toward goals they set or that have been set for them. Your timeline might not match reality. Don't lose sight of the relationship in an effort to speed things along. One of our challenges is living with the dichotomy of the many hopes for positive experiences you'd like to see happen and the short length of the time together.
3. Judgment –if you begin judging actions or choices, either by words or behavior, the relationship you've been trying to establish can be very damaged. As with any friendship, exercise caution when acting upon negative judgments of a person. Existing patterns of behavior are hard to change.<sup>19</sup>
4. Discipline –it is not your job to discipline a child in the place of their parent. Redirect, offer problem-solving suggestions, simply state an alternative, but never grab or handle a child unless it is necessary to stop potential harm or violence.

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<sup>18</sup> Silver Springs Interfaith Housing Coalition Program Committee, "Welcome to Mentoring with SSIHC" (Silver Springs, MD: SSIHC, 2004, photocopied), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,3.

## APPENDIX E

### THE TASKS OF A FAMILY FRIEND CHANGE WITH THE FLOW OF CAMP

#### **Preparing yourself before camp**

There are many suggestions that people have found helpful in preparing volunteers to be Family Friends. Here are a few of the best practices:

1. Prepare yourself mentally for working with a low-income family. Read articles about the problems such families face in your area. Invite a social worker or community service agency to update you on realities in your community. Read a book like *Nickel and Dimed*, by Barbara Ehrenreich, to get a better sense of challenges faced by low wage workers in America.
2. Initiate a study of *Community with Children and the Poor: A Guide for Congregational Study*, based on the United Methodist Bishops' Initiative. Use especially chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6. Begin to get your church acquainted with the goals of the Initiative, even, or maybe especially, those leaders who are not going to be involved directly in Creation Vacation.
3. Volunteer in a soup kitchen, food bank, or with a housing group in your community.
4. Talk with families with small children, offer to work in the church nursery, or baby-sit for a young family.

5. Think about yourself being in the position of having small children, and very limited income. What needs do you think you might have? Discuss these with someone before you come to camp.
6. Recall a time when you were a stranger and were welcomed.
7. Think about what creates hospitality –a space and atmosphere that offers freedom where change may take place in all the people present (in the Friend as well as the family).
8. Take the quiz about the hidden, underlying rules that are operative in different economic classes in our country. Use the book, *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*, for further study in your church classes, groups and circles.
9. Identify strengths as well as burdens, gifts and contributions as well as limitations and sticky issues for each different experience of class. Use the exercises suggested by Betsy Leondar-Wright in her book, *Class Matters*.
10. Think about a friend you have. What qualities do you value most in that friendship? How are you as a friend? Think about your experience of being a friend and having a friend.
11. If it is possible to work it out, Family Friends might attend the last of the pre-camp meetings held for the participant families. More and more interest has been expressed in getting to identify each other at least by sight before camp actually begins. This may allay fears, or cause others –we’ve not tried this before –so experiment and share your reflections with others involved in Creation Vacation.
12. Some practical things to bring: pen or pencil and paper or small notebook, flashlight, toiletries and towels, change of shoes, sleeping bag and pillow. Also bring if you

have them: some children's books, quiet games, musical instruments that can be shared, nature exploration ideas, craft ideas. It is very helpful if you can teach a skit, song, game, etc.

### **Camp begins –before arrival of families**

1. Be on time for orientation and training that happens at camp before the families arrive. This is often scheduled for the 24 hours ahead of the camp start time, but certainly no less than 4 hours ahead of the start of the event. You'll want to meet the staff and other Family Friends that comprise the team for the event, tour the site and become familiar with any particular safety considerations, and review the schedule for the days ahead.
2. Visit the cabin or other space where your family will be staying. Place a welcome sign with their names on the door. Check to see whether there is anything needed or required (sleeping bags, infant crib, etc.). Pray for the family and mentally prepare for greeting them here.
3. Assist staff in any last-minute preparations and be ready to greet people when the vehicles start arriving.

### **At camp –when families arrive**

1. Meet your family and assist them to their living space.

2. Give out nametags (or go together to area where nametags are being made if this is a planned arrival activity), and distribute any materials like schedule, map of camp, and camera (if available) that every family should have.
3. Review the schedule for today, and then tour the camp together, helping the family get familiar with where we're going to eat, the bathrooms, the main meeting areas, and other areas of interest for which there is time to make an initial visit.
4. For the first day at least, eat all the meals with your family –instructing them on the routines that are helpful at camp, assisting with feeding children, and how clearing of tables is done.
5. See that your family knows of choices of activities and signs up for those that are of interest and age-appropriateness. None are required! Sometimes rest and relaxation is more important than anything we can schedule.
6. Get acquainted by finding out about interests, where they have lived, hobbies, things you have in common. Use names and eye contact to make sure you get to know each one in your family. Show genuine concern for all –you're going to be “best friends” for the next few days!

### **As Camp Continues**

1. You are not to be a “baby-sitter”, but a friend who naturally cares and assists where and as needed. What parents will want to do varies from family to family. Some may want to do every activity offered; some almost none –so, remember, it's *their* vacation –and their choice as to what to do.

2. It is your responsibility to meet your own needs. If and when you need time away –tell your family that you need a break. If they are OK without you for the time being, fine –go do what you need to do. If they likely will need assistance while you are away, ask another staff person to take over for you. Get your rest!
3. Share your life and Christian faith as appropriate, but also ask and listen to and for their stories. We want to encourage faith expression, but not proselytizing.
4. Open dialogues, not a monologue. Ask questions, but do not pry into lives. Listen and share as friends with mutual respect.
5. Discuss any disturbing behavior in context so that your family knows that you care about them and their safety, and that of others. Be honest, but not controlling.
6. You may have times of conflict. Seek to learn from such times, and be quick to apologize as appropriate.
7. Enjoy a great partnership through the days at camp –remembering how much God loves each and every person, and rejoicing in the wonder of all creation.

### **As Camp Finishes**

1. Don't be surprised if toward the end of the camp session the participants begin to pull away emotionally. We have found it not at all unusual for people to begin to get upset by things that yesterday were just fine. Suddenly it seems you can't do anything right or pleasing. This is a

natural occurrence, self-protective, and it helps if you anticipate the possibility of the tensions that sometimes are displayed. Talk about this if it seems to be happening. Naming it helps.

2. Help collect and pack for return travel the craft projects, rocks and shells, or any other mementos of the time at camp.
3. If families have been given cameras and these have been collected for development of photos, make sure the family has theirs to take home.
4. Help the camp staff collect sleeping bags and liners to be washed, and any other items that were borrowed.

### **Back home again**

1. You may find yourself viewing things differently around town. We hope so! Are you more aware of neighborhoods where low-income families live in your community? Are you more curious who uses the food bank at your church? Connect with others in your church to find out more, talk about your camp experiences, and see where it leads.
2. If you did not previously convene a study group, consider leading one now using resources like *Nickel and Dimed*, *Class Matters*, *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*, or *Community with Children and the Poor*. Your United Methodist Women's groups might also have related study resources to explore.
3. People ask about what level of continued contact with families from camp is appropriate. Most have found that a card or call once a month is a

fantastic way to keep in touch. You're not trying to solve problems or contribute to codependency that would not be helpful, but you are finding a way to keep in touch as friends.

4. If you're in the same community with the families from camp, plan for some continued contact through your church. Invite children to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, include families in dinners and special programs as well as inviting to church services if they don't already have a church home in which they are already active. If photos were not distributed while at camp, use them as an opportunity to initiate a visit to the family and deliver the photos, or have a reunion gathering at church to hand them out.
5. If you sense barriers at your church, work on those with whatever groups might need to be involved –Sunday School teachers or superintendent, Trustees, others. Build a team with others who have been involved in Creation Vacation or similar experiences. What will it look like in your congregation “to reshape The United Methodist Church in response to the God who is among ‘the least of these’”?<sup>20</sup>
6. Work on housing or hunger issues in your community.
7. For a comprehensive follow-up, utilize the Action Checklist from the Pan-Methodist Campaign for Children in Poverty, which includes three sections 1) educating the congregation about the needs of children and the

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<sup>20</sup> Task Force for the Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, *Community with Children and the Poor* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2003), 5.

poor, 2) reaching out to children, and 3) advocating for legislation and public policies that improve children's lives and the lives of poor families.<sup>21</sup> The ideas and suggestions you'll find in this checklist will keep the momentum from camp going for a long time and has the potential to involve many people in the congregation.

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<sup>21</sup> Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation & Union, *Pan-Methodist Campaign for Children in Poverty*, ed. Luther E. Smith Jr. (Charlotte, NC: self-published by Commission, 1999), 5-10.

## APPENDIX F

### EXAMPLES FROM CAMP --EXPERIENCES FOR TRAINING

**Example:** The grandmother in the family doesn't seem to want to do anything at all at camp other than sit on the porch of the cabin and smoke and chat.

You check with the camp staff for a "butt can" and safety concerns regarding smoking, but once those guidelines for safety and health are in place, you spend time just sitting and visiting. On the third day of camp, grandma suddenly declares that it's time to see that beach everyone's been talking about, and asks you to show her the way. It's the first time in her life she's ever seen an ocean, figured she could wait a few more days and get rested up first!

**Example:** You know or sense that both parents in the family work very hard and you want this to be a nice vacation for them and their children. You find yourself jumping up to tell them they don't have to sweep the dining room after every meal, but then realize maybe this is how they want to show appreciation and accomplishment --that this is a way they can "give back" and not be seen as taking only. You compliment their work and contributions to the whole camp.

**Example:** Mom is very proud that her son is not only regular in attendance at school this year, but also has taken an interest in violin lessons thanks to a

very fine teacher in the school. After talking with mom and son and finding out that he would like to play for others, you find another volunteer who you know plays the violin also and arrange for a practice session and a special duet to be shared for grace that evening.

**Example:** The young parent seems always to be telling her children that they shouldn't touch things that they are finding of interest at camp (pine cones, stones, things along the trails), and that in general, she tends to shut down experiences for them. In conversation you talk about whether she's ever had a chance to make a nice craft like the one on display at the lodge that utilizes natural elements, and whether she might like to give that a try and then to lead her children in the same activity tomorrow. You take the kids to play for awhile so she can check out the craft area.

**Example:** A crisis about the rent due is suddenly remembered and mom wants to make a phone call home to another relative. She returns from the call with an even longer list of troubles. You listen, hold off on judgments, and find that just being a listening ear is more calming than any problem-solving you may tried to supply. Because you've begun to build trust, when you do make a suggestion at the end of camp for her to talk with the case manager about the series of troubles and complications, the idea seems to be well-received.

**Example:** Around the campfire circle, the younger boys and girls are getting excited about marshmallows to come at the end of the singing time. You notice that mom holds back, tries to make her boys sit still, and isn't sure

what comes next. You offer to hold the baby so that mom, too, can roast a marshmallow. Her sons seem to take pride in the fact that mom is doing this with them and that her marshmallow is perfectly done. Later, with a big smile, she tells you that was a first time ever experience for her, and she just might do it again!

**Talk it over...**

What made these examples work out? What else would you have said or done in the situation?

How did the Family Friend in the scenario display one or more of the principles of mentoring or being a Family Friend?

If you have any inner conflict about the choices or actions, how do you resolve it?

What situation(s) that might come up at camp do you have a question about?

If you're training in a group setting, write those situations on index cards, collect them and let everyone draw one from the pile and answer how they might approach the given scenario. Then open up your discussion to the whole group to see if there are other suggestions on how to handle the given situation. Make a list of items you have further questions about that you'd like to refer to the camp staff to address.

## APPENDIX G

### JOB DESCRIPTION FOR CAMP DEANS

1. Some have found a “Dean team” to be most helpful –one person to work year-round as the primary link to the participant families, one person to recruit-train-support the Family Friends, and one person to organize the program at camp. This is especially helpful in the larger camps, but also could be a good way to share the responsibilities, use everyone’s best gifts, and involve more persons from any one location.
2. The Dean or team should visit onsite with the camp site director in order to be familiar with the unique features of the site as well as considerations like sleeping facilities, number of people who can stay in each building, restroom locations, kp or other participant responsibilities at camp, director’s expectations of you.
3. Initiate and maintain connection with community partners who are working with you in the selection of family participants. Establish a time line for publicizing camp, families to sign up, pre-camp meetings to be held. Hold pre-camp meetings with them. Share helpful materials with your contact persons and be ready to work with their ideas for their particular clients. One great idea is to take a photo of each family and have the parent(s) write down the name and age of each child. Double check spelling of everyone’s name (add nicknames if helpful). Record information about each family –special needs or interests, language, food/dietary requirements, special equipment needed. Provide the rest of the team with this information so that needs are met as best as possible.
4. Recruit and train Family Friends. Outline expectations including pre- and post-camp meetings as well as time at camp. Send out and receive back from each Family Friend volunteer information and disclosure forms, a health form, and other relevant material for camp. Collect forms and turn in to site director. Recruit more potential Family Friends than you think you may need –some persons may drop out, and some families may need more than one friend. Support Family Friends by being available to guide them in this role –before, during, and after camp.

5. Establish a basic schedule for the camp, likely developed along with input from the site director or program resource people. Look at what the site provides, what skills and interests the participants and Family Friends might offer, and what additional resource people would be helpful to recruit.
  
6. Assign housing for all.
  
7. Plan for the 24-hours together at camp before families arrive. Arrange for orientation with camp staff regarding safety concerns or other important information for everyone.
  
8. Make sure everyone is clear as to how the following will be taken care of:
  - Greeting families as they arrive
  - Orientation of families to site
  - Nametags
  - Dining procedures
  - Overall schedule and activities
  - Grace at meals
  - Options for worship, campfire, other whole group times
  - Sign-up sheets for activities, if required
  - Evaluations
  
9. Enjoy camp! Be available to support people and adjust schedules as best serves the needs of all.
  
10. Assist local churches in debriefing experiences at camp and how to stay involved in community. Follow-up with Family Friends once back home.
  
11. Assist in raising support for additional Creation Vacation experiences –speak with others, provide opportunities for more people to get involved through donations of in-kind and financial gifts needed to continue this ministry.

## APPENDIX H

## EVALUATION FORMS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR DEBRIEFING

A variety of Evaluation Forms are available at each site. Check with your site Director to see which would assist you the most. You may want evaluations from both participant families and from Family Friends. Often informal evaluation is happening through conversations throughout the time together. Family Friends should be alert to gathering information that would be helpful for next year's camps. The following are some sample questions to you may wish to review with Family Friends:

What were the high points of the camp experience for each member of the family?

What suggestions or changes would they like to see for next year?

Are there activities that someone in the family would like to initiate or assist in leading next time?

As a Family Friend, what pre-camp training would be helpful to you?

What questions do you have now as you look to returning home?

Who will you see when you get back home? Back to your church? What will you tell them about Creation Vacation camp?

Will you see your camp family around town? Will you introduce your new friends to others?