

Camping and Retreat Ministries Board Report

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Karen Dillon

Virtual Summer Camp is very different from face-to-face camp. There is no eating together, but some kids snack or finish breakfast as we meet. We don't go swimming, even though some campers have just gotten out of the shower. The only campfire we see is the one found on YouTube. Our hikes and nature studies are found in video form. We don't hug, hold hands, sit close together or touch each other physically. Some would think our camping experience this year was dull and boring. Those descriptors are not even close to what camp is like this year.

Three mornings a week the school age campers click on the Zoom invitation to meet at 10:00, depending on their age. Mondays are for campers in Pre School through 2nd Grade. Tuesdays have 3rd to 5th Graders meeting. 6th through 8th Graders click on camp on Wednesdays. Knowing teenagers don't like to get up early, the High School campers meet at 4:00, in the afternoon. Fridays are for Family Camp at 7:00, in the evening. We have been experiencing camp for six weeks and have two more weeks left.

Every camp starts their day with announcements and then singing with Ben Tipton. Ben will be a junior at Manchester University, studying music. He has prepared camp songs, videoed himself, and sent the video to us so we can play them each week. We all join in the happy singing together, although we must mute ourselves, because of technical delays in transmissions of our voices. The theme song this year, sung at every camp, is Ken Medema's "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying." His song fits so nicely to our camp's curriculum "This Is Our Prayer."

The next part of our time at camp is the Bible study. Our Bible study teachers are dynamic and talented in bringing the messages about different ways of praying, different times of praying, and different purposes of praying. Scriptures have come alive with the use of YouTube Lego people, kids retelling Bible stories, puppets, cartoons, dramas, and artwork. Even old-time flannel board figures have made an appearance. All the lessons point to the importance of prayer. Last week's Bible study was on the daughters of Zelophehad. We explored this little story in Numbers and its great implications of applying Bible truths to today's world.

Following the Bible study, we have activities, all kinds of activities. Each camper received a hand delivered bag filled with all the supplies needed for the camp this summer. Those campers living far away in Columbus, Thornville, Indiana, Illinois, Maine, received their bags through the mail. It took two days with seven volunteers to pack all 83 bags as each of the different camps required unique materials appropriate for the age group. Then another crew of people took the bags all over Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. The campers were amazed at the collection each bag contained and wondered how the items were going to be used. Slowly each week, the individual items were called for and used to support the daily study. Using a party blower to demonstrate Jonah and the big fish was lots of fun. Easter eggs became emoji faces. Pipe cleaners and paint sticks represented Bible characters. Beaded, braided, colorful yarn bracelets became prayer reminders as did birds nests, wind chimes, and paperclip chains. Every camp has been challenging the campers to first create prayer reminders and then use them.

Lee Saylor has been our technical advisor and engineer, who handles all the videos and added attractions sent to him to enhance the lessons and activities. The people, who may not be able to join us in person, have sent videos of themselves to teach or explain activities. Lee is talented in assisting us and very faithful to attend every camp.

One volunteer was called back to work at Williamsburg, Virginia. She still wanted to be a part of camp. On days she is not working, she joins by Zoom. On her working days, she sends the video of her activity. She can be there even though she is not there in person

Many volunteers are involved with the camps. Some of them read books to the campers. Others prepare the activities. Bible study is handled differently in each camp. At some of the camps, Bible study is taught by one person. In other camps the task is shared by several.

Our time together at camp goes so quickly. Campers, counselors, and visitors are all drawn into the singing, stories, questions, conversations, games, and interesting activities. No one notices how the time flies, because everyone is involved and participating. We close with a time of prayer using new techniques like a finger labyrinth, responsive prayer, five finger prayer, prayer bead bracelets, and shared prayer.

One would assume camp would be over for the day after prayer, however some campers stay on the Zoom connection to talk together. Two campers who have been separated for a couple of years because of a family move, have been happily reunited. They spent an hour catching up after camp was over for the

day. The Zoom meeting transported them to each other's houses. Campers have stayed just to be with each other, enjoy the company and opportunity to share informally. Since I am running the Zoom meetings for camp, I close my video, but stay close by to insure the campers stay safe. They have all been very respectful so far.

No one knew a year ago what a drastic change our would take. Nurturing campers and sharing our faith in God goes on during difficult circumstances. Our virtual camp is an expression of this district's commitment and willingness to step out in faith to bring God's message of love, compassion, and mercy to campers in a new and exciting way.

Thank you for letting me be a part of how camp changes lives. It certainly has changed my life this year.

With great respect,

Karen Dillon