

## The Mission

The mission of the Religiously Affiliated Camps (RAC) is to inspire, equip, and support faith-based camp staff to nurture spiritual growth through the camp and retreat experience.

# RAC

Religiously Affiliated Camps Newsletter

From the RAC Council • Spring 2008

## RAC seeks to...

**R**elate issues, trends, and resources concerning spiritual formation to faith-based camp leaders.

**A**rticulate the faith-based voice to ACA on issues impacting programs.

**C**reate opportunities for faith-based networking that encourages dialogue, understanding, learning, and support.



## The POWER of the EXPERIENCE

Orlando 2009 • February 17-20

### Save the Date

**American Camp Association® (ACA)  
2009 National Conference in Orlando**

**RAC Lunch** • Wednesday, February 18, 2009

**Michael Brandwein** will speak about faith and the camp setting. We are grateful to be able to announce that

**Church Mutual Insurance** will sponsor the lunch.

### Ministry to Special Populations

This request appeared in my e-mail one morning: "Can you please write an article about special populations and what role faith plays in our response to their needs?" When I first received the e-mail, I was sure it would be an easy task. I am often asked to talk about how and why my agency runs a fully inclusive camp for children with a complete spectrum of disabilities. I answered the request with my own question, "Why not?"

For me, being involved in an inclusive camp has never been a question of religion or faith—rather one of humanistic values. I don't understand it as a philosophical question, because I don't understand the notion of exclusion. However, I have never really considered the role that my religion and my faith play in my dedication to having a fully inclusive camp environment. I was told that my article should be about 1500 words but my instinct was to write only five: "We are ALL G-d's children." \* This is a notion subscribed to by many different religions. In Judaism, we believe that "we are all created in the image of G-d, and each of us is to be valued." To me, that says it all. If we are ALL G-d's children, how can we turn our back on our brothers and sisters who need us the most?

*\* In Judaism, we are taught not to write out the full name of G-d in case the paper on which it is written is destroyed.*

## Contents

- 1 ACA 2009 National Conference in Orlando
  - RAC Luncheon
- 2 Ministry to Special Populations
- 3 Report on the RAC Survey
- 4 Reflections on Saved by Hope
- 5 Resources for Camp Leaders
  - Working With Special Populations
  - Staff and Spirituality



5000 State Road 67 North  
Martinsville, Indiana 46151  
P. 765-342-8456 • F. 765-342-2065

[www.ACAcamps.org/rac](http://www.ACAcamps.org/rac)

Religion and camps provide a natural community for people in which people come together and share a set of common interests, beliefs, and values. This sense of community is what draws many people toward religion in the first place. For children with disabilities and their families, the need to belong to a community is made stronger by all of the experiences they face being excluded from a variety of other communities. Being part of a community does not mean being “the same” as everyone else in the community. A community actually thrives when it is made of people whose strengths and weaknesses complement each other.

### Challenges of Inclusion

The inclusion of children with disabilities in camp programs presents numerous challenges—logistical, financial, and “attitudinal” to name only a few. Yet, I would argue that the presence of challenges only begs the question of how to do something, not whether to do it. There are times when we may lack the materials to build a ramp or the money to pay for a lift-equipped camp bus, but if we call upon our faith—faith in G-d, faith in other human beings, and faith in ourselves—we can remove the biggest barrier of all, our own fear.

My faith has played a role in my passion toward inclusion, and my faith has grown tremendously because of the work that I do. The children have changed my life and my perspective far more than I have impacted theirs.

When I was a young camp counselor, there was a thirteen-year-old girl who had some learning and language disabilities and who had lost her sight at age seven. Her outlook on life amazed me. What she lacked in actual vision, she made up for with an intuition and insight far deeper than anyone I have met since.

One morning when I went to pick her up from the camp bus, I was feeling very cranky. She stepped off of the bus, took my hand, and before I had a chance to say a word, she said to me, “Why are

you sad today? What’s wrong?” I told her I was really fine. She said to me, “Well, I am SO happy to see you today.” Her words were tinged with irony as she couldn’t literally “see” at all. At that moment, I realized that her “vision” was sharper than mine and perhaps, sharper than most. Despite her obstacles, every day was a beautiful day for this camper and almost nothing could bring her down. I don’t think G-d brought her to me so that I could help her; I think G-d sent her to teach me.

### Values That Camps Teach

Those of us on the “inside” know that being a camp professional is not all “fun and games” even though it may appear to be to those on the “outside.” Presumably, if we search within ourselves to discover the reasons that we became camp professionals, none of us will conclude that we are in this for fame and fortune. Rather, most of us are on this challenging, yet beautiful and endlessly gratifying, path because we want to make a difference in the lives of children, and we want to impart certain core values that will remain with them throughout their lifetimes. According to the American Camp Association® (ACA) Web site—at camp—kids learn powerful lessons in community, character-building, skill development, and healthy living that can be learned nowhere else. Are these faith or religiously-based values or simply human values? There may not be much of a difference.

One of the earliest values that we teach to children is “The Golden Rule”—to treat others the way that you would wish to be treated. This concept is embedded in almost every faith and religion.

- In **Judaism**: What is hateful to you, do not do unto your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)
- In **Christianity**: In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Jesus, Matthew 7:12)

- In **Hinduism**: This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)
- In **Sikhism**: I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all. (Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 1299)

### Nature of G-d’s Love

Another idea subscribed to by many different religious traditions is the notion of G-d’s unconditional love. We are taught that G-d loves us despite our transgressions and imperfections. If we are all created in the image of G-d, then we, too, should bestow unconditional love on our fellow human beings. What better way to reinforce this idea to our children than to teach by example?

I believe that when children are born, they are all gifted with unconditional love and acceptance for everyone around them. Throughout their lives, however, discrimination and fear of those who are “different” are learned. When children with and without disabilities attend camp together from an early age, the fear may have the chance to be examined.

To a child, something “new” happens every day. Seeing a friend eat his lunch through a feeding tube rather than simply something new rather than something scary. Similarly, when a child asks, “Why is Joshua sitting in that wheelchair?” the child simply wants to know why. Once given the answer, they can chalk it up to something new learned that day without feeling that there is a reason to fear or harbor judgment.

### Personal Reflections

My mother, who was not particularly religious but very spiritual, often tried to help others understand my autistic brother’s place in our world. She said that each of us was different from each other in the same way that no two pieces of a puzzle were the same. If even one piece was missing from the puzzle,



she explained, then the puzzle was not complete. If Roger's puzzle piece was missing, the world was incomplete just as if anyone else's piece was missing. We must believe this if we believe that G-d created each of us.

I believe that I went into this profession because I wanted to "help" people. Twenty years later, I am the one who has been blessed by my relationships with children with disabilities and their families; I am the one who has learned lessons and grown spiritually. Perhaps, over the years "responding to their needs" is technically something I have done. Through them, however, G-d has responded to mine.

#### **Eva Cowen**

*Director, Special Needs  
Jewish Community Center  
of Greater Washington  
Rockville, Maryland  
ecowen@jccgw.org*

### **Results of the RAC Survey on Special Camp Populations**

Last year, in my role as staff to the RAC Council, I was invited to participate in writing a grant focused on aiding camps serving "special populations."

One of the major challenges was to define what we meant by "special populations" within the camp community. Based on my years as a camp director, I knew how I would define that term and the populations my camps had served. However, the group as a whole had no data concerning special populations served by faith-based camps. ACA did not receive the grant, but the RAC Council decided that it wanted to try to gather the information that had been lacking for the grant writers. Thus, we were given the focus of this year's Spring RAC Survey.

One of the first goals of the survey was to find out how faith-based camps defined "special populations." The results of the survey revealed that responding camps served physically challenged (59 percent); mentally challenged (67.3 percent); and minorities other than the ethnic/ethnic identity of the majority of their campers (51 percent). In addition, one third of the responding camps served populations with special medical needs such as ADD/ADHD (42.9 percent); cancer/oncology (42.9 percent); autism (42.9

percent); and HIV/AIDS (21.7 percent). This seems to support the initial impression of the grant writers that camps defined "special populations" in a variety of ways.

Another goal of the survey was to discover how camps viewed the relationship between their faith-based mission and the choice to serve special populations. More than half of the respondents (56.6 percent) said that it was part of their mission to serve diverse groups with varying needs; over seventy-five percent responded that they believed God called them to serve all people. Slightly less than ten percent confessed that they had never given it any thought.

In terms of programming, the majority of camps mainstream mentally-challenged campers (56 percent); physically-challenged campers (73.7 percent); and terminally-ill campers (80 percent) within their regular camp programs. To serve these campers they have made cabins (88.8 percent); dining rooms entrances (88.6 percent); trails (17.1 percent); and ropes courses (34.3 percent) more accessible. When asked what places the greatest limit upon their ability to serve special populations, two-thirds (67.4 percent) said it was lack of facilities.

The dream question of the survey was, "How would you spend a grant of \$500,000?" Camp leaders responded in a variety of ways. Many mentioned specific and/or general changes they would make to increase the accessibility of their site for both summer and rental use. Many dreamed of training staff, adding staff, and scholarships. Others mentioned better marketing and promoting of what already existed. You can read all of the responses at [www.ACAcamps.org/rac](http://www.ACAcamps.org/rac).

Many thanks to those of you who took the time to share your experiences.

## Reflections on Saved by Hope

As people working in the camp industry, I would guess this phrase rings true to us all. In our work, campers come to us from their regular lives for a period of time and they go back somehow better than before; they gain new knowledge, insight, connection to creation, faith in things unseen, a relationship with others, a relationship with God, and perhaps, hope. Or at least we hope they gain some of these things.

“Saved by hope” is more than a reflection for camps; it is a theme that Pope Benedict the XVI has shared with the world. After his recent pastoral visit to the United States that had a theme of hope, I sat back and looked at a letter he wrote to the world a few months before his visit. This letter, called an encyclical, is titled, *Spe Salvi*, that is, “Saved by Hope.”

In his letter Pope Benedict reflects on the role of hope in our lives. He takes an honest look at hope and asks his questions with a willingness and desire to find the answers. “What is hope? What do we hope for? What is the reason for this hope? What good is hope?” If we have hope for our campers and desire them to gain hope at our camps, then these are questions we must ask with the same honesty and searching heart that the pope asks.

“To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope” we read in *Spe Salvi*. Further on as an example of what he means, he cites the story of St. Josephine Bakhita. Born in the late 1800’s in the Darfur in Sudan, she lived most of her life as a slave, going from one cruel master to the next. She came to hope—that is, to faith—through one of her masters who wasn’t as cruel as the others.

She says this of her hope and faith: “I am definitely loved, and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love, and so my life is good.” This is what we want our campers to walk away with. This is the hope we have for them.

Elsewhere in *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI asks another question that is critical to what we do in religiously-affiliated (RA) camps. “Can our encounter with God . . . who has shown us his face and opened his heart, be for us too, not just ‘informative’, but ‘performative’—that is to say, can it change our lives so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses?”

### Practical Questions for Camps

This raises many practical questions about our camp’s programming. Does our programming merely inform people about faith or does it introduce our campers to a faith that changes their lives and brings them hope? Within our identity as religious camps, faith is at the core of who we are. How does this identity show in the daily life of our camp? How does this hope emanate through all we do beyond prayer before meals? How does this faith change lives on the sports field and ropes course? Do we only inform about faith in bible studies and catechesis, or does it transform lives through all we do and, more importantly, who we are?

### Newstalgia at Camps

Michael Wood is the vice president of TRU Research which specializes in making connections with “twens, teens, and twenties.” Wood spoke at the ACA national conference about ways to connect with the minds of this generation. One thing he mentioned is something he called

“newstalgia.” Newstalgia, he said, is taking something old and “nostalgic” and presenting it in a new light and giving it fresh life. Newstalgia is showcasing your traditions and heritage with vibrancy instead of relegating it to dusty books and photos. Companies that do this

are succeeding with the youth market.

This is an area where we, as RA camps, can excel. We have traditions that go back thousands of years reflecting our understanding of God. The reason the pope writes encyclicals is to present the ancient truths of the faith in ways and for situations that are relevant to people today.

Religious traditions differ in names they give the leaders who bring the faith to their believers. Perhaps you have bishops, imams, elders, or rabbis. However it is done, we at camps have a responsibility to listen to these teachers of the faith and bring their words to our campers in vibrant and engaging ways.

As faith-based camps we are lucky since we have more resources than just what a bookstore offers. Our faith communities have brought hope to people for centuries, and people within those communities have been writing and talking about how we practice our faith. We need to know these resources so that we can use them. Our job is to give ancient faith, which is the hope for tomorrow, relevance for our campers and staff today within the camp setting.

### Shawn Madden

*Director of Prairie Star Ranch  
Catholic Archdiocese  
of Kansas City, Kansas  
PrairieStarRanch@gmail.com*

## Resources for Camp Leaders

### Resources for Including Special Populations at Camp

There are a limited amount of resources available to assist those who want additional information about ministering to special populations and embracing them within a camp program. The resources fall in two categories for the purposes of this article. First, there are resources created primarily for local churches and faith communities. Included are short reviews suggesting ways they can be used by camp leaders. The second category is a list of books available from the ACA Bookstore (link) that are not reviewed. If you are familiar with any of these resources and would like to review them for a future issue of the newsletter, please contact me at nanfergi@aol.com.

### RAC Council

Mark Burkhardt - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Jay Nordgaard - American Baptist Camps  
Kevin Witt - United Methodist Church  
Katie Evenbeck - Episcopal Camps & Conf Ctrs  
Curtis Britcher - The Salvation Army  
Robert Pryor - Presbyterian Camps  
Paula Worden - Pioneer Clubs  
William Wood - Seventh-day Adventist Churches

### Category One: Reviewed

#### *Including People With Disabilities in Faith Communities*

Erik W. Carter, Ph.D.  
Published: 2007

This is a comprehensive look at ministry to the disabled and is written for service providers, families, and congregations. Although addressed to congregational ministry, there is a wealth of background information, theological reflection, and practical suggestions that can aid and direct any camp leader who desires a firm grounding in this area of ministry. The list of resources and agencies is up-to-date and useful.

#### *All God's Children*

Gene Newman and Joni Eareckson Tada  
Published: 1987

This is Joni Eareckson Tada's personal perspective and story. She speaks of the way in which God has provided for her needs and the ways she has been touched by the ministry of others. Chapters of this book would make a valuable read for staff who have never talked to a disabled person or who have struggled to understand how God could let disabilities or accidents happen to someone.

#### *Feed All My Sheep: A Guide and Curriculum for Adults With Developmental Disabilities*

Doris C. Clark  
Published: 2000

Created for a congregational ministry to adults with developmental disabilities, this resource offers thirty-four lesson plans on the main themes within Christian faith for special adults. The lessons could easily be adapted to the camp setting.

### Category Two: Unreviewed

#### *Inclusive Games; Movement for Fun for Everyone*

Author: Susan L. Kasser  
Published: 1995  
Price: \$17.95

#### *Connecting Kids: Exploring Diversity Together*

Author: Linda Hill, Ph.D.  
Published: 1998  
Price: \$14.00

#### *Strategies for Inclusion*

Author: Lieberman/Houston-Wilson  
Price: \$28.00  
Published: 2002

#### *Getting the Most Out of Diabetes Camp*

Author: American Diabetes Association  
Published: 2002  
Price: \$5.00

#### *\*Including People With Disabilities in Camp Programs: A Resource for Camp Directors*

by Glenn Morris Roswal (Editor),  
Karen J. Dowd (Editor),  
Jerry W. Bynum (Editor)  
Publisher: American Camping Association, Inc. (1997)  
ISBN-10: 0876031564  
ISBN-13: 978-0876031568

\*Out of Print – Check Amazon.com

#### *Staff and Spirituality*

##### *Training Staff To Be Spiritual Leaders*

Author: Nancy Ferguson, M.Div.  
Publisher: Healthy Learning/ACA Bookstore, 2008  
ISBN978-1-58518-665-5  
Cost: \$19.95

Heading into my twenty-fourth summer season as a camp leader, I often look for a new resource for staff training, something that helps identify and teach ways to lead staff members to the next level of their own spiritual development. Often I've taken various resources from church or the business world and adapted them to the unique setting we call camp. *Training Staff to Be Spiritual Leaders* gives me what I want without having to adapt or translate it to the camp setting since it is written specifically for faith-based camp staff training.

The author gives you easy to understand information and explanation, plus dozens of specific activities you can use to help nurture the spiritual development of your camp staff by using the simple acronym SPIRIT:

- Stop
- Prepare Your Heart
- Inspect Your Own Spirituality
- Relate Within the Community
- Inspire Others to Wonder, Creativity, and Gratitude
- Tell Stories, Remember, and Celebrate

In this book, you will find some familiar activities plus some that are likely to be new to you. The best benefit of this resource is that someone has finally put a wide variety of activities together into one book and written it with the camp setting in mind. Being able to copy some of activities for your own educational purposes is a nice bonus.

I've already purchased copies for all my volunteer directors so that the insights of the book can be incorporated into our staff training this summer. If you're looking for a camp-specific resource you can use to train your counselors and staff to consider their own spiritual development and have some specific tools in their "tool belt" in which to help their campers explore, nurture, and develop their own spirituality, then *Training Staff to Be Spiritual Leaders* is a great resource for you.

#### **Jay E. Nordgaard**

*Executive Director of Redwood Glen  
An American Baptist center  
in Loma Mar CA  
www.redwoodglen.com*

---

#### **About the Editor**

*Nancy Ferguson is an outdoor ministry consultant who directs a day camp at Camp Hanover in Richmond, Virginia, edits the New Earth camp curriculum, and works with camp leaders in the area of program development. She is the author of several books on camp program leadership and relates to the RAC Council as a management consultant. You can visit her Web site at [www.BlueTreeResources.org](http://www.BlueTreeResources.org).*