

# Partnering to Share the Gospel: Day Camps at Churches

Rev. Betty Angelini, Crestfield Camp and Conference Center, Pittsburgh Presbytery  
[www.Crestfield.net](http://www.Crestfield.net)

February 2015

Imagine your church filled with children and youth joyfully singing, laughing and sharing-not just during a week in the summer but throughout the year. Imagine youth and young adults sharing in the leadership responsibilities of such activities. These children, youth and young adults are from your church and from your community, eager to come and be in relationship with caring individuals who share the love of Jesus. This image and the vibrancy that comes with it can be more than just a dream. This vitality is happening in churches within the denomination thanks to a partnership between summer camp sites, local congregations and presbyteries.

Building on the deep faith and leadership impact overnight camp has on children and youth, camps, like Pittsburgh Presbytery's outdoor ministry site Crestfield, located in southwest Pennsylvania are finding transformative success in partnering with congregations for day camp at their churches and in their community. "Collaborations such as this have an immediate impact on furthering Christian witness in communities of need", reports Rev. Dr. Doug Portz, Senior Associate Minister for Pittsburgh Presbytery. "We are excited in Pittsburgh Presbytery to see how such partnerships directly touch the lives of countless children with the love of Jesus Christ, equip and re-energize disciples in local congregations, as well as, teach and build missional skills and capacity for continuing Ministries of outreach in our twenty first century context."

Crestfield's model starts by providing a whole week during the summer of half day daycamp planned, led and implemented by Crestfield's staff in conjunction with the congregation. The half day can be either in the morning or in the evening, which ever works best for the needs of the church and its community. The Crestfield staff brings an abbreviated camp day structure along with the needed supplies to the church-worship and music, bible study, arts and crafts, and recreation. Indoor and outdoor spaces are used for all components, even Bible study. Not only does being outdoors help with the development of a love for God's creation, but also provides a unique form of publicity that naturally draws more children in attending as the week passes. One day during the week, the daycampers and church chaperones travel to Crestfield for a full day of swimming, canoeing, outdoor exploration and fun!

This effort is more than a partnership in space. It is also a partnership in relationship building and the human resources needed to provide a daycamp that is similar to the traditional Vacation Bible School. During the precamp preparations, relationships between camp and church are developed as they study the curriculum's scripture texts together as well as work cooperatively to determine who will do what during the week long experience. Each year of the three year program, Crestfield works to hand over more responsibility, teaching and modeling more skills to the congregation with the intent of equipping the congregation to be able to offer daycamp independently after the third year. Through

this extended period of doing ministry together, working side by side, relationships are developed between church and camp. Yet, relationships also develop between the adults and the children served. In the first year, this relationship development is the main objective for the church. With the Crestfield staff taking care of the majority of the programming details, the church contingency can develop and deepen meaningful relationships with both the children and their parents that hopefully will continue throughout the year. When the Crestfield staff leaves after the end of the summer week and before they return during Advent, Lent and/or the next summer, church members have relationships to build upon in sharing the Gospel throughout the whole year.

Perhaps Laura Smith, former Daycamp Coordinator at Crestfield and now Director of Christian Education for Sunset Hills Presbyterian Church can best describe this transformative daycamp experience:

“Each week, myself, along with one or two other counselors left Crestfield and traveled to a church in Pittsburgh and led their daycamp for that week. It was not an easy task. It was different and challenging for the counselors and myself to leave friends and campers at camp for the whole week and stay in a home of an unknown church member. However, the church volunteers were great to get to know. It is not always easy working with strangers in their home turf, but after reminding them and myself that we were there to help them and teach them, things were great. By the end of the week everyone’s hearts were transformed. As tough as it was to leave Crestfield and go to a different place on Sunday, it was just as tough to leave each daycamp and go back to Crestfield on Friday.”

The local church, Crestfield, and the Presbytery as a whole share in the financial costs of this partnership. Pittsburgh Presbytery’s Administrative Commission for Transformation provides funding for staff training and program expenses. Churches provide housing and meals for the Crestfield staff during their week at the church. Crestfield ensures its staff is well trained in the curriculum, faith formation and behavior management while also ensuring the needed certifications and background checks for safety are in place. Everyone provides their love for Christ and a willingness to share that love through hospitality and outreach.

Daycamp from the camp and conference perspective can serve many purposes and take place at various venues. Chameleon like is a great descriptor for daycamp. Daycamp can be held at the camp’s site itself and run simultaneously with or independently from residential camp. Just as a chameleon changes its outside color, traveling daycamp can be taken on the road and adapted as a camp program offered through a church for a community at their own site. Change again, and the daycamp can be a tool for equipping churches to live into the great commission of sharing the Gospel with those in their community. Regardless of the venue, daycamp, a partnership with camps and churches, can be a relationship building, transformative experience for all. And isn’t that what the Gospel is all about?