

INTERNATIONAL

Journal

OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

E. Wein



Special Issue on

New Patterns for Church Camps and Conferences

January 1953

Camping by Families

The experience of the Outdoor Education Association with camping by families can give valuable guidance for those planning church family camps

by L. B. Sharp

IT IS NOT EASY to plan program for family camps. The program must give consideration to the wide differences in age and interests of the children and adults attending, and at the same time encourage families as families to work and play together. In our camps, operated by the Outdoor Education Association (formerly Life Camps), we have experimented with short term family camping for many years. A brief description of the program and how it operates may be helpful to those planning family camps sponsored by the church.

Like many organizations, we grew into the family camp idea rather than starting a family camp as such. For the most part this activity was carried on at our Girls' Camp. When campers passed the age for the Chil-

dren's Camp, the interest of these ex-campers continued and they expressed a desire to return for a post season experience. Gradually this reservoir of ex-campers increased and a special group of alumni campers was organized. They set up an organization with officers and conducted a year round program, of which naturally, going to camp was the main event.

A short camping period of twelve days was held at the close of the Children's Camp season. Most of those interested were working girls and the camp experience was a vacation time activity for them. Soon many of these alumni campers became married and they brought their husbands and children with them.

This has now become truly a family camp program, although there are always some who are not married. Membership in this group is open

only to those who have been campers at our camps. This assures fine camp spirit. When a girl camper marries, her husband is usually a new member to the group but she takes him in hand and very quickly conditions him to the camp way of doing things. Children are introduced to camp living at an early age. When they become eight years old they are then eligible to attend the regular children's program at the Girl's Camp or the Boys' Camp.

During this family camp session, the attendance varies from fifty to ninety people, including unmarried women, married couples and their children.

The program is quite different from the regular session for the children's camps. It is definitely a vacation time and the activities are planned and carried out with that in mind. However, the interest in field trips, overnight camping, cooking out, and various kinds of explorations maintain the major interest. Of course swimming, fishing, and boating stand high on the list.

Physical accommodations needed

Since the camp grounds are laid out on the decentralized plan, it makes an excellent set-up for taking care of family groups. In one small camp there are accommodations for eight to twelve people. There are ten small camps in all. Each has water piped to the location and each camp has its own toilet facilities. Every camp has cooking and eating facilities and each family cuts its own

Mr. Sharp is Executive Director of the Outdoor Education Association, New York City.



Rodney M. Britten

A marshmallow roast for everyone climaxes a busy day at family camp.

wood. All shelters are canvas—teepees, round-tops, covered sleds, hogans and covered wagons. Sometimes two families occupy one small camp. The single people are fitted in here and there wherever compatibility can be assured. One possible combination is for two families to go together in a small camp. They take turns in taking care of the children. One family will take all the children for the morning, afternoon or evening, giving the other parents an opportunity to do something by themselves. In the evening after the children are put to bed, one of the parents or a counselor takes over as baby sitter and the others are free.

It is interesting to see various combinations of families sharing each other's children. A father will take the responsibility for those youngsters who want to go fishing. If there are too many for one father it is easy to get a second to volunteer. Quite often the family will go by themselves to the lake to fish or to take a hike over the camp trails or to take their lunch and have a cook-out some place on the countryside. Frequently the small camp groups will plan their own menus and cook their meals over the open fire. This is a very popular activity and gives them real experience in cooking out. Very often they will have their own family camp fire program in their small camps. Sometimes families will join together for camp fire programs, square and folk dancing, and singing.

Either in the morning or afternoon the counselors will take the children in some of the camp activities, thus giving the parents a chance to relax and enjoy some things by themselves such as craft, nature, swimming, fishing and hiking. This has an additional benefit because it gives the counselors a chance to work with the children and in that way they can be of help to the parents in discussing any problems which arise.

One of the most interesting and valuable outcomes is the session conducted with the parents concerning child care. There are a number of meetings held with the parents so that they can discuss openly the problems that have arisen with the children. These discussions have to be handled with tact and diplomacy because most parents are quite sensitive about their children and the way

they handle them. Yet they are eager for advice and help. These meetings cover a wide range of subjects, including their school work, activities at various clubs and organizations to which the child belongs, problems in the home, the boy-girl relationship, and numerous other important questions. Special books and pamphlets are made available for the parents concerning child development and these are used by the parents not only at camp but at home as well. There is an opportunity for parents to have private conversations with the director and staff concerning problems which they may not care to present in an open discussion.

In the dining hall there is a separate room where the small children eat. This has proven to be very helpful. Parents often complain about the difficulty in getting their child to eat certain kinds of food. They are often amazed to see how the children respond to the camp menu and in a different atmosphere eat everything that is put before them.

The fathers get together from time to time to discuss matters in which they are particularly interested. These sessions with the dads have proven to be very interesting and constructive.

What camping does to a family

One of the substantial outcomes of the experience is the unifying influence that camp has on the family. If they have had an enjoyable experience together at camp, they want to return as a family. They count on this period as their vacation time together. This, of course, is one of the chief objectives of the family camp program. Their interest in camping continues back in the home. At the meal table and at other times they recall their experience together at camp, look at pictures they have taken, see the objects they have made in the craft shop of wood or clay. In many ways their camp experience is kept alive during the winter months.

Some family camping is carried on during the regular summer camp season at a place called "The Old Timers." Two small camps are provided for the camp alumni group. Twelve to fifteen can be accommodated at a time. They stay from one to two weeks. They purchase food supplies from the camp village store

and do all of their own cooking.

Often these family groups will pack some food in the car and drive back to camp on weekends and holiday to spend the day there. This is a lot to the good and should be encouraged as much as possible.

Many family camps report similar values gained from the family coming as a unit. It is one of the phases of camping that should be further encouraged. This is not the easiest type of camping to manage. The age range is so great and provisions must be made for men and women, boys and girls, which does add a lot of complications. As experience is gained in handling these mixed groups and ages, ways are being found successfully to operate the program.

One of the most difficult problems in operating family camps is that of housing. Experience shows that families often expect much the same facilities at camp as they have in their homes. When camps try to meet these demands they end up in building expensive cabins and cottages. It does seem a tremendous economic waste to provide these expensive summer camp facilities and have them idle for eight to ten months of the year. If children are given real camping experiences, later as parents they will want to continue the outdoor living type of camping.

There is a marked trend throughout the country in state parks and conservation departments to provide more facilities where families can go camping. In one state park a family can rent space for 25c a night for the entire family. The family has to provide its own canvas and equipment and cook its own meals. The park will furnish wood for a small fee and does furnish water, toilet facilities and garbage removal. This kind of set-up puts a premium on real camping.

In laying out a new church camp site or redesigning the present one the family camp should be considered as an integral part of the total program. Adequate space should be set aside so that family groups can either use the small camp or bring their own camp equipment. The churches of the country have an excellent opportunity to promote family camping and it is logical that they should take the lead.

wood. All shelters are canvas—teepees, round-tops, covered sleds, hogans and covered wagons. Sometimes two families occupy one small camp. The single people are fitted in here and there wherever compatibility can be assured. One possible combination is for two families to go together in a small camp. They take turns in taking care of the children. One family will take all the children for the morning, afternoon or evening, giving the other parents an opportunity to do something by themselves. In the evening after the children are put to bed, one of the parents or a counselor takes over as baby sitter and the others are free.

It is interesting to see various combinations of families sharing each other's children. A father will take the responsibility for those youngsters who want to go fishing. If there are too many for one father it is easy to get a second to volunteer. Quite often the family will go by themselves to the lake to fish or to take a hike over the camp trails or to take their lunch and have a cook-out some place on the countryside. Frequently the small camp groups will plan their own menus and cook their meals over the open fire. This is a very popular activity and gives them real experience in cooking out. Very often they will have their own family camp fire program in their small camps. Sometimes families will join together for camp fire programs, square and folk dancing, and singing.

Either in the morning or afternoon the counselors will take the children in some of the camp activities, thus giving the parents a chance to relax and enjoy some things by themselves such as craft, nature, swimming, fishing and hiking. This has an additional benefit because it gives the counselors a chance to work with the children and in that way they can be of help to the parents in discussing any problems which arise.

One of the most interesting and valuable outcomes is the session conducted with the parents concerning child care. There are a number of meetings held with the parents so that they can discuss openly the problems that have arisen with the children. These discussions have to be handled with tact and diplomacy because most parents are quite sensitive about their children and the way

they handle them. Yet they are eager for advice and help. These meetings cover a wide range of subjects, including their school work, activities at various clubs and organizations to which the child belongs, problems in the home, the boy-girl relationship, and numerous other important questions. Special books and pamphlets are made available for the parents concerning child development and these are used by the parents not only at camp but at home as well. There is an opportunity for parents to have private conversations with the director and staff concerning problems which they may not care to present in an open discussion.

In the dining hall there is a separate room where the small children eat. This has proven to be very helpful. Parents often complain about the difficulty in getting their child to eat certain kinds of food. They are often amazed to see how the children respond to the camp menu and in a different atmosphere eat everything that is put before them.

The fathers get together from time to time to discuss matters in which they are particularly interested. These sessions with the dads have proven to be very interesting and constructive.

What camping does to a family

One of the substantial outcomes of the experience is the unifying influence that camp has on the family. If they have had an enjoyable experience together at camp, they want to return as a family. They count on this period as their vacation time together. This, of course, is one of the chief objectives of the family camp program. Their interest in camping continues back in the home. At the meal table and at other times they recall their experience together at camp, look at pictures they have taken, see the objects they have made in the craft shop of wood or clay. In many ways their camp experience is kept alive during the winter months.

Some family camping is carried on during the regular summer camp season at a place called "The Old Timers." Two small camps are provided for the camp alumni group. Twelve to fifteen can be accommodated at a time. They stay from one to two weeks. They purchase food supplies from the camp village store

and do all of their own cooking.

Often these family groups will pack some food in the car and drive back to camp on weekends and holidays to spend the day there. This is all to the good and should be encouraged as much as possible.

Many family camps report similar values gained from the family coming as a unit. It is one of the phases of camping that should be further encouraged. This is not the easiest type of camping to manage. The age range is so great and provisions must be made for men and women, boys and girls, which does add a lot of complications. As experience is gained in handling these mixed groups and ages, ways are being found successfully to operate the program.

One of the most difficult problems in operating family camps is that of housing. Experience shows that families often expect much the same facilities at camp as they have in their homes. When camps try to meet these demands they end up in building expensive cabins and cottages. It does seem a tremendous economic waste to provide these expensive summer camp facilities and have them idle for eight to ten months of the year. If children are given real camping experiences, later as parents they will want to continue the outdoor living type of camping.

There is a marked trend throughout the country in state parks and conservation departments to provide more facilities where families can go camping. In one state park a family can rent space for 25c a night for the entire family. The family has to provide its own canvas and equipment and cook its own meals. The park will furnish wood for a small fee and does furnish water, toilet facilities and garbage removal. This kind of set-up puts a premium on real camping.

In laying out a new church camp site or redesigning the present one, the family camp should be considered as an integral part of the total program. Adequate space should be set aside so that family groups can either use the small camp or bring their own camp equipment. The churches of the country have an excellent opportunity to promote family camping and it is logical that they should take the lead.