

Sampler

**CREATIVE
ARTS CAMP**

Four Summer VBS Programs

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PART

1

HOW TO CREATE YOUR CREATIVE ARTS CAMP

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Chapter 2: A Planning Timeline

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Chapter 4: Daily Activities

GETTING STARTED WITH CREATIVE ARTS CAMP

The Origins of Creative Arts Camp

Welcome to Creative Arts Camp! A version of this content was originally released in 2015 by Morehouse Publishing as *Arts Camp: A Creative Customizable Alternative to Vacation Bible School and Beyond*. Christina Clark wrote this book based on her work as the Family Minister at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Denver, Colorado. She continued the summer program started by Jane Schmitz, her predecessor at St. Barnabas. Jane began this creative approach to summer ministry in 2001 when she offered a weeklong event that was different from the traditional VBS approach used by so many churches. She ended up designing a Music Camp, with Bible Stories, crafts, cooperative games, movement, and singing. This camp was open to all kids—not just members of the church and not just kids with prior musical experience.

In June of 2001 the first Music Camp was offered. Led by Jane, it was staffed by volunteers and musicians who were paid a stipend for their work. On the following Sunday, kids shared some of what they'd experienced. Everyone loved it—the congregation, the kids, and their parents. Jane invited her volunteers to evaluate each camp to reflect on what worked and what didn't. For instance, they discovered that camp worked best for kids entering first through fifth grade. (Kindergarteners didn't have enough stamina for the full day and sixth graders didn't like being at camp with “babies.”) Providing lunch worked better than having kids bring lunches. Each year they used information from the previous year to make improvements.

Jane Schmitz expanded camp to include more creative arts in 2006, inviting a sculptor, a painter, and a dramatic reading coach to widen the focus of the camp. Beginning in 2010, her successor Tina Clark continued this arts camp tradition at St. Barnabas, writing a book about their program that was published in 2015. The book you are holding is adapted from Tina's work and retains many ideas, tips, and suggestions from the St. Barnabas experience.

What Is Creative Arts Camp?

What? Creative Arts Camp is an alternative to traditional Vacation Bible School programs. This book offers the basics for creating your own version of Creative Arts Camp, with four themes to choose from: Praise, Creation Care, Who Is My Neighbor?, and Saints and Holy Helpers. All content is developed around a theological view of living into Christ's call to love one another and to seek peace. Each camp uses music and song, visual art and media, drama and storytelling, and movement and game-playing to enter into Bible study around the theme. You will find resources, music suggestions, art projects, and sample schedules to help you create a camp that fits your church's needs, population, theology, and more.

Who? Creative Arts Camp builds community by involving children, youth, and adults in active, energetic, scripture-based activities. Creative activities are led by an artistic team—paid visual artists, musicians, actors, and others who can teach with expertise. Activities are designed for kids entering first through fifth grade. You can invite children in your congregation and broader community to attend. Consider offering leadership opportunities to your congregation's youth, with middle schoolers serving as junior counselors and high school students serving as senior counselors.

When? Creative Arts Camp can be scheduled for a 5-day week, with activities planned from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. You can also offer a half-day program if that is a better fit. Consider providing free or low-cost child care before and after the 6-hour program to accommodate families who need earlier drop-off and/or later pickup times. You could also use this content for a week-long experience for kids during Spring Break or other school vacation times.

Where? Plan your Creative Arts Camp in your church or another place that has a variety of spaces available to accommodate large group gatherings, art studio space, rooms for music and movement, and a place to prepare and serve food and eat together.

How much? Plan to charge a per-child rate based on the cost estimates for food, materials, and payment to your creative artists. Plan to provide scholarships for anyone who needs assistance, and include this information on all publicity.

Why offer Creative Arts Camp instead of a traditional VBS program?

Some children's ministry leaders report that a traditional 5-day VBS program is working well in their context. If you are looking for alternative to this format, Creative Arts Camp may be a great fit. Perhaps you're ready to try something new and different. Perhaps you're tired of the superficiality of some pre-packaged VBS programs. Perhaps you've felt that VBS doesn't connect with some of kids the way you hope it would. You may be looking for ways to spend your ministry dollars on materials for kids and talented staff rather than preprinted curriculum and media resources.

Creative Arts Camp's flexibility allows you to shape its structure and content to fit your church's personality and theology, as well as current events and ministries. You can change the pace and amount of programming each day if needed. Because nothing is scripted, leaders use the scripture readings, quotes, and ideas in ways that fit the direction the kids are going.

Camp culminates on Creative Arts Sunday during an energetic and celebratory worship service when you can include you can include the readings and songs from their week together. Many VBS programs feature a Sunday celebration when kids sing the songs they learned during the week. With Creative Arts Camp, kids offer what they've done, learned, discovered, explored, and created through their creative expressions of music, art, dance, and more through their Creative Arts Camp Offering.

Who is involved in Creative Arts Camp?

Building your Creative Arts Camp team may sound daunting, but a church of any size can do it. You will need to create a team with a set of talents including administration, program development, visual art, music, drama, movement, and support. The good news is that they may be closer than you think.

Camp Director: This role is most likely filled by the children's ministry director or faith formation leader. This person takes on the organization, planning, leadership, administration, and day-to-day running of Creative Arts Camp. If you have fewer than 50 campers, this person can also lead the large group time and other programmed parts of camp. If your camp will have more than 50 campers, plan for another adult volunteer or two to lead these times.

Youth Leadership Opportunity: The Camp Director can recruit a few youth assistants to help with the many inevitable last-minute and unexpected tasks that will happen during the week. Consider offering this type of Director Assistant position to one or a few well-organized high schoolers.

Parishioners: Look within your own congregation. Do you have any art, music, or drama teachers who are part of your church community? Many educators who are not teaching during the summer months may enjoy this weeklong commitment that includes a stipend conveying that their time and training are valued. They might also welcome the opportunity to express their own faith as they use their teaching talents. You may also know of talented college students returning home for the summer who are gifted in one or more creative arts and have gifts for teaching kids.

Youth Leadership Opportunity: Middle and high school youth have many creative talents to share. Recruit students who are instrumentalists, singers, dancers, and visual artists to help with the leaders of each creative arts area.

Local Artists: If creative arts teachers in your congregation are not available, ask them to recommend local educators who may be interested in this opportunity. You could also look for talented teachers at an area art center, theater, or music school. A piano teacher, school band or orchestra conductor, or community theater performer may be available. One note about hiring artists: not all talented artists are also skilled teachers. Interview potential candidates, ask about teaching experience, request references, and look for an opportunity to see their teaching skills in action. You could invite them to a Sunday School class to lead a one-time session with kids.

Youth Leadership Opportunity: Ask your artistic team if they would like to have a high school assistant during the week to help with preparation, clean-up, and other tasks. Offering this opportunity for a young person to learn from a creative artist may lead to great results.

Small Group Leaders: You'll need a team of adults who accompany small groups of kids as they

move through each day's activities. These Small Group leaders will stay with the same group of kids all week. They do not need to have any specific artistic skills, only willingness to form relationships with kids and accompany them through each day's activities.

Youth Leadership Opportunity: Assign one or two students to be with each Small Group Leader during the whole week with kids. Middle and high school students can serve as junior and senior counselors who provide enthusiasm, model positive behaviors, and develop leadership skills during this daily contact with younger kids.

Kitchen Leaders: Recruit a few adults to shop for food and to coordinate and serve snacks and lunch each day. They will purchase and prepare food, set out snacks and lunch, and clean up afterwards. Adults who are not a good fit for other roles may appreciate being on the kitchen crew.

Youth Leadership Opportunity: Ask youth if they are interested in helping with snacks and lunch. Middle and high school students who are not interested in small group time with younger kids may feel more comfortable helping in the kitchen.

What spaces do we need for Creative Arts Camp?

When Creative Arts Camp began at St. Barnabas in Denver, they discovered that they needed to use several parts of their building each day. You may find that you need to plan a total building takeover as well. Plan to use these types of spaces for your Creative Arts Camp.

Welcoming Space: Find a place where caregivers can drop off kids, turn in any needed forms, and pick up any handouts, lost and found things, or other items. This space may also contain posted information and reminders for parents. A hallway near the church entrance or the narthex outside the sanctuary works well for this welcoming area. Place a rolling cart with bins or baskets to hold any camper items, such as medications or water bottles.

Gathering Space: You'll need an open area with enough space for everyone to sit together and see and hear everyone. If you use the same space for other functions like eating together, quiet time, or movement, plan how to keep it uncluttered so you can easily shift to these other purposes. You may use a fellowship hall, sanctuary, or multipurpose room for this area.

Food Serving Area: Provide a place where kids can snack and eat lunch by moving quickly through a line to pick up their food. Make sure your kitchen team can move easily between the kitchen and the tables where food is served so they can restock and clean up efficiently.

Art Studio: Use a large space with a tiled floor and nearby sink for your art-making space. You'll need several tables for project work along with tables to hold supplies and materials and to place finished projects. Make sure you have a plan for kids to pick up these finished projects.

Music Space: If possible, plan to meet for musical activities in your worship space or other place with a piano or keyboard. Plan for your music leader to use a microphone and speakers so everyone can hear music and lyrics.

Drama and Movement Space: Use a large open space for these activities so kids have room to dance, jump, role-play and more. If your building has a stage, you can use it for dramatic activities.

CHAPTER 2

A PLANNING TIMELINE

Six Months Before

Set the Date: Choose a date for your camp. You'll need to work with your church staff, the artistic team, and adult volunteers to find a date that works for everyone. Remember to plan Creative Arts Sunday immediately following the week of camp. Set your date and announce it in January to help caregivers plan ahead for the summer.

Reserve the Building: Work with your church administrator, building coordinator, or other person who takes the lead on planning how your church building is used. Reserve the spaces you need for the week of camp, along with any prep time you may need before the week begins. Consider reserving the evenings as well so you don't have to put everything away at the end of each day. This may mean groups that meet in the evening may choose to cancel their use of your building.

Choose the Theme and Title: Select the specific Creative Arts Camp theme you'd like to use from the four options in this book. You can use the title provided or select your own title. For marketing and program purposes, choose a camp title that can be described in one word or a short phrase. Keep the theme broad enough that you and your team won't be overly limited in choosing projects, music, scripture, and stories, but specific enough to give everyone a path to follow.

Plan the Budget: Establish a fee for camp. Start by estimating your costs. You will be purchasing food and needed supplies, and you'll also provide stipends for your creative artists. Consider purchasing t-shirts for all participants as part of the camp fee. Then research local weeklong day camps and their average fees, and what's included in these fees, such as meals, snacks, and materials. Set a weekly fee for campers, offering a lower rate for middle and high school leaders. Make sure all families know that scholarships are available to cover part or all of the registration fee. To keep your budget manageable, ask for donations of food, supplies, and other needed items.

Five Months Before

Design the Logo: Invite one of your art leaders or a graphic designer to create a logo for your camp. The logo should look clear and readable on t-shirts, posters, online, and other formats. Locate a vendor to print the logo on white t-shirts at an affordable price. You can create separate designs for your volunteers and artistic team with their roles printed on the back of the shirt, or print their shirts on other colors. Plan to have campers tie-dye their shirts during the week.

Open Registration: Create print and online versions of registration and publicity materials. Hang flyers in your church and the neighborhood. Publicize in your church's bulletin/worship folder, newsletter, and web site. Remind members that they can invite friends, neighbors, and relatives to attend. Advertise online through social media. You can use and adapt content found on the sample registration forms in this book.

Ask for Deposits: Set a due date for the registration forms and ask families to place a deposit. If possible, provide an early bird discount to encourage timely registrations. Registrations should be due at least a month before camp so you have estimates for the number of kids attending and their ages. You will always have late registrations, but providing different ways for families to remember and register for camp will help you estimate accurately.

Decide on Ratios: Estimate how many artists, Small Group Leaders, youth helpers, and other volunteers you will need based on your initial registration numbers. Plan for small group sizes no bigger than eight kids if you only have an adult leader. You can increase group size if you have youth counselors.

Three Months Before

Publicize Registration: Continue promoting Creative Arts Camp in your congregation and broader community. Make sure all publicity provides information about dates, times, costs, and, if you're providing it, availability of child care before and after the camp day. Encourage caregivers to register their children by offering early bird discounts and other incentives. Make sure they know kids can invite their friends.

Plan the Week: Schedule a time for the artistic team to gather for a two-hour meeting to plan the creative content. At least two weeks before this meeting, provide the theme along with information you have about the estimated number of campers and youth volunteers attending. Ask them to bring their creative ideas to this meeting. Bring as many ideas and suggestions as you can: music, songs, art projects, games, movement activities, Bible stories, and other resources. Develop a basic schedule for how kids will rotate through creative activities each day. Based on their experiences, the team at St. Barnabas recommends that with fewer than 30 kids, the group may be able to work on the Visual Arts activities all together but split into two groups to cycle through Music and the Movement/Drama stations.

Connect with Worship Leaders: Once you meet with your artistic team to plan the week, talk to your church's worship leader(s) to confirm how kids can make creative contributions to the Sunday worship service following the week of camp. Make sure you know what Bible lessons will be read.

Recruit Adult Leaders: Publicize the need for adult volunteers in your church bulletin/worship folder, newsletter, and web site. Personally invite people with gifts and talents that match the needs of the camp. Make sure you have an accompanist for songleading on piano or guitar. Ask others in the congregation for recommendations. Describe your background check policy so all volunteers know what to expect.

Recruit Youth: Ask your church's youth ministry leader(s) to share information about the camp and the need for middle school and high school leaders. Make sure they know about the different positions that are available. Personally invite youth you know. If you think one or a few youth have the maturity and skills to meet the responsibilities of assisting the camp director, ask them to apply for this position.

Publicize for Needed Materials: Once you finalize the creative activities, create a list of needed items so you can begin to collect them. Make sure to plan a place to store them.

One Month Before

Continue to Publicize Registration: Let caregivers know there is still time to register their kids for Creative Arts Camp. Make sure publicity includes the registration cut-off date.

Train Leaders: Schedule a one-hour training session with child care at a few different times for adult volunteers. Ask youth leaders at your church about the best way to plan youth volunteer training so you can schedule these meetings when they can attend. Provide beverages and snacks at each training meeting. Develop an agenda and commit to finishing on time. Use the suggestions in this book for planning the meeting agenda.

Collect Payments: Remind parents of the date that final payments for camp are due. Try to collect most or all payments at least one month before Creative Arts Camp so you can cover the costs of food and materials.

Submit Check Requests: Turn in the request for your artistic team's stipends so they can be compensated at the end of the camp week.

Confirm T-shirt Printing Vendor: Locate a vendor for printing t-shirts. Make sure your registration packet asks campers to indicate shirt sizes, and collect this information from youth and adult volunteers and the artistic team during your training sessions.

Create a Master Shopping List: Begin listing all supplies you'll need to purchase at stores and online, including food, supplies, and other items. Post this list online so other leaders can review it and add items.

Two Weeks Before

Close Registration and Confirm Numbers: Decide whether you will accommodate last-minute registrations or whether you want to end registration so you have accurate numbers to create small groups, organize t-shirts, finalize supply needs, and print registration lists.

Finalize Allergy Policy: Once you have all registration forms, you will know which children, youth, and adults may have food allergies (i.e., peanuts, tree nuts, gluten) and/or other allergies or sensitivities (latex, fragrance, etc.). Develop a plan for ensuring that your entire space will be safe for those with allergies, including posted signs, emailed reminders, and trained kitchen volunteers.

Order T-Shirts: Place an order for t-shirts with your vendor and confirm the pick-up date. Give your team time to organize shirts rather than having them delivered the day before camp begins.

Meet with the Artistic Team: Meet again with your team to finalize schedules, activities, supplies, and all other details. Be prepared to answer questions, provide support, and add to your master shopping list. If you will reimburse them for any additional costs, make sure they know the policy for submitting receipts.

Finalize the Master Shopping List and Start Shopping: You'll need to wait to buy perishable food items, but you can begin to shop for needed items a few weeks before camp begins. Decide whether you'll serve food and drinks using disposable or washable dishes. (The team at St. Barnabas recommends a low-waste approach using washable or compostable dishes and utensils.) Ask your artistic team to submit their supply lists to you by this time so you can begin shopping for these items. For items you are collecting from members, place a large box in a visible spot for them to drop off donations.

Finalize Music Selections: Based on the meeting with your artistic team, finalize the songs that kids will learn and pass along song titles and any music (sheet music, audio files) to your accompanist(s). Confirm plans for when that person will be playing music during the week and at the Sunday worship service.

One Week Before

Email Caregivers of Campers: Send an email to parents welcoming their kids to camp in just a week. Remind parents of dates, start and end times, and any other details. Make sure all parents know about your allergy policy so all families know what you are doing to keep kids safe. Campers should not arrive more than 15 minutes early nor stay more than 15 minutes late every day. Ask that campers bring a beach towel and a reusable water bottle—both labeled with the child's name or initials—on the first day of camp to be left at the church for the week. Remind families that campers should wear clothing they can run in, get wet, and otherwise messed up a bit.

Create Camper Groups: Based on your final registration list, create small groups of five to ten kids and assign an adult Small Group Leader along with one or more youth counselors if you are providing this opportunity. You may choose to assign groups of kids in the same grade or create mixed-age groups depending on the number of kids, your volunteer leaders' preferences, and other factors.

Contact Youth Volunteers: Contact all youth volunteers with the final version of the camp schedule, who they'll report to, and what they will be doing during each day. Make sure to thank them for their participation in this experience and let them know their gifts are important.

Print All Documents: Make copies of all needed documents, such as sign-in and sign-out sheets, song lyric posters, signage, release forms, and other papers as needed. Templates are provided in this book.

Shop for Food: If possible, shop for food on the Friday before camp starts and deliver everything straight to the church kitchen. Label all food "For Creative Arts Camp" so it is not accidentally used on the Sunday before camp begins.

A Final Word

Throughout your planning process, ask those in your church community to join you in prayer for your Creative Arts Camp. Ask God to be present in this time together as kids, youth, and adults gather to learn, share their gifts, and grow in faith together.

Keep in mind that something unexpected will happen every day: a project will go long, a song you thought they'd love will flop, a counselor will be late, or something else. As the Camp Director, you set the tone. If you can laugh off a glitch, take time to solve a problem, and keep the tone positive and compassionate, everyone else will follow your lead.