



## CHAPTER 1

## What Is Arts Camp?

**A**RTS CAMP WAS DEVELOPED AS AN ALTERNATIVE to pre-packaged Vacation Bible School curriculums by leaders and volunteers at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Denver, CO. It began as Music Camp, and expanded to Arts Camp nine years ago. Now in its fifteenth year, this Camp has grown and evolved as a vital and beloved component of our Family Ministry. Kids who attended as our first Campers now help run camp as Senior Counselors, and a new generation of elementary-aged Campers excitedly fill our parish halls and sanctuary with voices, song, and laughter for a week every summer.

Arts Camp uses music and song, visual art and media, drama and storytelling, and movement and game-playing to enter into Bible study around an established theme. Themes have included *Praise*, *EcoJustice*, *The Call to Love our Neighbor*, *Interfaith Spirituality*, and *Saints and Holy Helpers*.

This book offers the basics for creating your own version of Arts Camp, as well as chapters on the specifics for building each of the five themed camps mentioned above. You will find resources, music suggestions, art projects, and sample schedules to help you create a camp that fits your parish's needs, population, theology, and more.

Arts Camp builds community and involves children and youth in active, energetic, scripture-based worship. Arts Camp at St. Barnabas nearly always rotates around a central theology of living into Christ's call to love one

another and to seek peace. All parish children are invited, of course. We also invite and include children from the neighborhood (we are mainly a commuter parish), friends and relatives of parishioners, and children from a local shelter. Through grants and careful stewardship of camp fees, we've offered scholarships to homeless, at-risk, and refugee children.

At St. Barnabas, Arts Camp takes place for a week each summer. The camp runs Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., with a culminating offering and celebration at that Sunday's worship service. Because of the absolute flexibility that comes with designing your own camp, Arts Camp could be offered in addition to VBS, as a Spring Break option for working parents, as an afterschool program, as a longer half-day camp, or as a Lenten or other seasonal study. A camp that fits your parish's personality, volunteer base, and needs can be adapted in a variety of ways. Beautiful!

We established Arts Camp as an offering for rising first through fifth graders, with middle-school youth participating as Junior Counselors and high-school youth as Senior Counselors. Junior Counselors are full participants in camp, with a discounted camp fee in return for a pledge that they will act as role models and mentors to the younger Campers. Senior Counselors pay only to cover their food and T-shirts (more on that later) and act as assistants to the adults who lead the camp. In general, we hire youth who are active participants in our parish

youth group; we know their strengths and can place a high level of trust and responsibility in them.

*Note:* Throughout the rest of this book, when we speak of “Campers,” we include the Junior Counselors, since their overall camp experience is the same as other Campers.

## WHY CREATE ARTS CAMP WHEN WE CAN PURCHASE A VBS CURRICULUM?

Perhaps you’re ready to try something new and different. Perhaps you’re tired of the slickness and superficiality of many pre-packaged VBS programs. Perhaps you’ve felt that VBS doesn’t connect with some of your children the way you’d like to.

Among the reasons we do Arts Camp in place of VBS is that it feels more organic for our parish. Its natural flexibility allows us to shape our structure and content to fit our parish personality and theology, as well as current events or ministries of the parish. We plan scripture and Bible study to support the goals of camp, as well as bring stories and quotes from a variety of non-biblical sources. This level of flexibility also allows us to change the pace and volume of programming each day of camp as needed. Nothing is scripted; you have a list of scripture readings, quotes, and ideas that are ready to use as they fit the direction the kids themselves take you.

Arts Camp Sunday is an energetic and celebratory worship service that has become a parish favorite. It is the culmination of the weeklong camp, and the time when the Campers offer what they’ve done, learned, discovered, explored, and created within our theme. Every year, there is a place in the service when the entire camp steps up and presents to the congregation. We refer to this presentation as the “Arts Camp Offering.” Additionally, the entire service includes hymns and readings that have been meaningful during our weeklong camp. In 2013, following our Interfaith Camp Offering, a parishioner who is vocally not fond of children leading worship shared with us how much he’d learned from and enjoyed

what the Campers brought to the Arts Camp Sunday service.

Throughout this book, the part of the service wherein Arts Camp takes the leadership role is referred to as the Arts Camp Offering. The service itself is Arts Camp Sunday. While the Offering can also be referred to as “sharing” or a “presentation,” it is never called a performance, as it is never our goal to put children on the altar as entertainment, but to be an integral and vital part of our corporate worship.

Because of the organic and flexible nature of a camp you create yourself, the Sunday Offering evolves as a product of the kids’ energy, interests, and leadership each year. Each specific themed camp chapter will tell you more about how to develop an Arts Camp Sunday Offering, and how to work with clergy to plan the whole of your Arts Camp Sunday service.

Lastly, by creating our own theme and camp, we are able to offer a faith-based camp that focuses on social justice and compassion. Our goal each year is to remind kids that they are the peacemakers of their generation and that they have the potential to create a lasting peace through active, compassionate living. This is the goal that fits for us. With a camp you create yourself, you can likewise direct your focus to fit that of your parish community’s life in Christ.

## HOW DO WE PLAN AN ARTS CAMP?

Building your camp from the ground up may sound daunting, but any parish of any size can do it. You will need to create a team with a set of talents—administration, program development, visual art, music, drama and movement, and support—and they may be closer than you think.

### Camp Director:

This is most likely you—the Children’s Minister or Faith Formation Leader who is reading this resource. This person takes on the organization, planning, leadership,

administration, and day-to-day running of Arts Camp. At St. Barnabas, this person also does the Bible study and program aspects of camp. For your camp, especially if it is a larger camp of 50 or more Campers, it may work better to have other Adult Volunteers who run Bible Study and Programming, leaving the Director free to manage the overall camp.

## Parishioners:

Look within your own congregation. Do you have any art, music, or drama teachers who worship with you every week? Many teachers are off during the summer and would love to make a small stipend while sharing their skill with the children of your parish. They may also welcome the opportunity to combine their spiritual life with their teaching talents, which they cannot do if they teach in a public school system.

At St. Barnabas we're immensely blessed: our entire Arts Camp team currently comes from within our parish. Our Art Instructors are visual artists and local art teachers who have time and talent they enjoy sharing with our kids. Our parish's choir director happens to be a gifted composer and music teacher with myriad gifts to offer our Campers, while our Associate Rector brings music, accompaniment, and her own scriptural knowledge and input to our sessions. Finally we have a wonderfully creative musician and storyteller who offers movement and song as well as stories, dramatic play, and accompaniment on the hammered dulcimer. In the past, we've had theater and drama teachers as well. Right now, movement and dramatic play fit our Campers best.

## Local Artists:

If the art or music teachers in your congregation are travelling or simply looking forward to being away from kids this summer, chances are good that they or other parishioners know someone who would be interested. Does a parishioner have a grown child or niece or nephew who teaches art and could use a little extra money? Does your city or town have a gallery district, art museum, or artists' cooperative where you might advertise? Artists are all around us. Many of them have time and

talent to share and would welcome a small extra paycheck next summer. A piano teacher, school band or orchestra leader, or community theater actor or actress may be available.

One note about hiring artists: not all talented artists are also skilled teachers. Interview these folks carefully, ask about teaching experience and references, and invite them to a Sunday School class to share their skills with the kids. If they have brilliant ideas for projects but cannot communicate effectively with children or demonstrate how to implement these brilliant ideas, everyone will be frustrated during camp.

## Do It Yourself:

Maybe you have the creative gene and can lead art projects yourself. If that's the case, go for it, but make sure you plan your time and transitions carefully. If you're leading art, then are also in charge of the next part of the schedule, you will need dependable Adult Volunteers and Counselors to help with cleaning up and wrangling stragglers.

In the first decade of Arts Camp, Art Instructors changed from year to year, while in the last few years we've been able to build and keep a team that works together well, enjoys the time with each other and with the children, and creates an increasingly seamless experience each year. Neither system is preferable in and of itself; what matters most is creating a team that works for your camp.

## Adult Volunteers:

Adult Volunteers are a great resource. Look for people to travel from one activity to the next with the Campers, to model desirable behavior, to help a little one who's struggling for any reason, and to report any hiccups to you. These folks are invaluable and should never be turned away! One year a camp parent sent her children's nanny to camp with them and she was worth her weight in gold!

We also recruit two or three Adult Volunteers for each day's lunchtime. These people come in to set out a

buffet for the children, monitor and restock as necessary during lunch, and then clean up while the Campers and Leaders head into our afternoon together. It is easy duty, and many parishioners who love to help but lack the time, desire, energy, or talent for working directly with kids sign up year after year. Ask these people to arrive about 30 minutes before you want to serve lunch, and to plan on being there until about 15 minutes after lunch-time ends. A checklist of instructions for them is included with other forms in Appendix 2 (p. 115).

It also works well to split the Campers into two smaller groups to work with one adult at a time; so while one group of about 15 is with our Music Instructor learning or writing songs, the other same-size group is enjoying their storytelling, movement, and dramatic playtime. They switch halfway through the session so all Campers have the same activities by the end of the day. Counselors are assigned to each group and are an essential resource.

Please remember to follow the procedures and policies of your church's governing body in terms of training and safety procedures whenever you use volunteers. In The Episcopal Church, all adults who work at camp

must have an active certificate in Safeguarding God's Children; a course that can be taken in person or online. Many parishes also hold an in-person Safeguarding training for youth volunteers.

## Building Use and Spatial Considerations:

We use separate parts of our building for almost every component of the Arts Camp day, which makes transitions go smoothly. At the minimum, you need these spaces:

- *An open space where everyone can sit together in a circle.* We have a movable wall that we use to create a slightly smaller space in our large parish hall. We also hang posters of scripture passages and quotations on this wall as we use them for programming. Because we use this same space to set out our lunch buffet, for our meditation and yoga after lunch, and for movement and drama in the afternoon, we need it uncluttered. We keep the space organized by providing several large, round plastic bins for the Campers' personal items, a bookshelf and box for supplies, and a rolling cart for a five-gallon water jug and the Campers' water bottles.





- *A large space for the “Art Room.”* You want room for several tables, some to hold supplies and materials, and the rest for kids to have plenty of space to work on their projects. It is certainly best if you can arrange for no other use of this room for the week, so projects

and materials can be left out at the end of each day. If that’s not possible, make sure you and your Art Instructor plan for time, space, and volunteers to clear out the room and store projects and supplies at the end of the day’s Art session(s).



- *Separate spaces for music and movement/drama.* We use the sanctuary for our music room. It is a lovely, light-filled space in the afternoons, and on hot days has the benefit of a swamp cooler—the rest of our 130-year-old building relies on portable fans and air conditioners. It also offers a piano. For movement

and drama, we return to the large, open, circle space used in the mornings. Because we keep this space uncluttered, it supports nicely whatever our Drama and Movement Instructor has planned for the day, with lots of area for kids to dance, jump, role-play, and more.

