



Spotlight on Crestwood #34

Vacation Bible School

A Stellar Experience

Sssshhh! By the time you read this, Vacation Bible School (VBS) will have been over for two weeks. But I bet Childrens' Minister Missy Wallace and her eighty volunteers are still resting and recuperating from the amazing week of VBS. They deserve the quiet.

I've never seen, nor experienced, anything like the Vacation Bible School treat that our Crestwood children enjoyed recently. It was extraordinary.

The theme of the week was "Stellar: Shine Jesus' Light." The experience was literally planned to be out of this world. I dropped by church several days before VBS opened and found Missy crawling down the long hallway from the central entrance, around the corner to the narthex. She was laying yellow and black striped strips, turning the hallway into a runway where the young adventurers would enter the space experience.



Later she was creeping along the floor of the sanctuary, attaching color-changing LED lights down the center aisle. She cajoled Mitchell Smith to return later to help rehang the backdrop that was sagging. There was a deadline, as she had arranged for someone to come over and steam the wrinkles from the huge outer-space scene that took up most of the front of the sanctuary. Space posters and door decorations were everywhere. Already, the decorations exceeded anything I had experienced in VBS.

From the get-go, my favorite thing was Lloyd, the astronaut, who sat silently in the narthex next to his spaceship. He was clearly on another planet with the pock-marked landscape around him. Lloyd was a human-sized medical skeleton, dressed in a NASA space suit loaned by Doug Wilkinson. He startled me every time I came around the corner in the empty church. Not so, once the place was filled with squealing, laughing children.

A few days later, after spending an evening with the program, I was left with an intriguing collection of vivid impressions. But before sharing the images, I have to explain how it worked. The 102 children were divided by ages into eight space crews, each crew adorned with designated-colored scarves, also worn by the leaders of the crew. A complicated schedule directed each group to a different activity every twenty minutes. Groups of children crisscrossed the church in a surprisingly organized way until everyone got to experience each area where activities seemed to change by age.

In the sanctuary, Amy Treneff and Megan Bacon danced on the chancel, arms flailing, leading the loudly-singing children in a movement/song video being shown on a big screen. In the art room, kids were painting with balloons dipped in bright colors. In the science room (choir room) volunteers helped the youngsters make a mess, mixing common ingredients to magically form slime. Kelly Hale conducted dramatic science experiments. The most impressive thing to me was creating a vacuum to get a hardboiled egg to pop into a bottle whose mouth was obviously too small for it. On the back lawn a group of fathers organized sack races, while other groups were more quietly (well, make that attentively) hearing stories and having lively Bible discussions separately with Youth Minister Steph Wallace and Pastor Kory. On the front lawn, a group of women supervised a game of tag whose rules I could never figure out. I understand there was a "water day" which was a big hit, but I can't imagine what all that entailed!

The opening and closing ceremonies were "happening events" with noise, laughter, and singing. Watching the volunteers, I tried to remember ever being that full of energy and patience.

The volunteers were as varied as the children. In one group I found the mother of several of the children, another was a mother with a baby too young yet for VBS, and there was a retired teacher who misses her students. There were a good many men helping as well.

Many of the children at VBS do not attend Crestwood, but all in the community are welcome to participate. Pastor Kory said that each year we gain several new members because of their positive

experiences with VBS. Eight children registered but were unable to attend. They each received VBS kits. And one of my favorite facts is that, at the end, all the elaborate props were boxed up and will be shared with churches in Costa Rica and Kenya, Africa. Jesus' love shines on.

Images that remain with me: I saw only smiles and laughter. I did not see a single child cry or sit off to themselves bored or scared. There was constant movement and involvement. I was impressed at Missy's never-ending calmness as she moved constantly around the area with her pink clipboard. I remember the determination on the youngsters' faces as they worked their ingredients into usable slime. I laughed to see Kory huddled in a tight circle on all fours as the five-year-olds crowded together to help him arrange battery lights into a heart shape and then a cross to remember God's love shines everywhere. They made God goggles with their hands to think where they saw God that day. Every activity was tied to the theme of shining God's/Jesus' light.

The noise at the closing was incredible and encouraged; both the kids and their volunteers seemed unfazed by the chaos. But the greatest clamor came when it was announced that so far 550 food items had been brought in for their service project. The items were being boxed and given to Glendover Elementary to supplement food shortages in some families. Our pastor, normally a sane man, had agreed to eat ants, beetles, termites, and scorpions, depending on how many food items were donated. It almost was worth it to return the next day to see what happened. I was afraid these would be live bugs, but incredibly, you can actually buy such things already prepared for consumption. To everyone's delight, I heard he ate all four creatures the closing day and didn't even gag. He explained the experience afterwards:

"The beetles were a little chewy and the rest had quite a crunch to them. It wasn't the best meal I've ever had, but I was glad to do it to motivate the kids to shine Jesus' light by helping others. I'm so glad we collected so much food! Eating some bugs was totally worth it."

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together. Gaye Holman@bellsouth.net



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