

God is still speaking, Vacation Bible School Learning Design

Joint project by First Congregational UCC and Mayflower UCC of Sioux City, Iowa and
UCC of North Sioux City of North Sioux City, South Dakota

It has become the tradition of the three sister churches of Sioux City, Iowa, and North Sioux City, South Dakota, to join together for the summer vacation Bible school to share an original program that meets their particular needs and interests. The three churches meet for VBS at a community nature center that has a variety of meeting rooms, an outdoor area and a kitchen area. It is fully accessible.

For 2005, we were inspired to explore the possibilities of The Stillspeaking Initiative as our VBS theme. The three planners, Pastor Theresa Herwynen of the North Sioux City UCC, Alaire Willits of First UCC, and Linda Cron of Mayflower UCC met to brainstorm creative ideas and goals. We then contacted Ron Buford and shared emails and conference calls with Ron and colleagues to discuss the possibilities. We completed the curriculum for a 3-evening vacation Bible school and were thrilled with the results. We are delighted to share this material with other churches to try out, to embellish, to enjoy, to inspire.

As a testament to the success of the VBS GISS theme, a little boy shouted his answer to a general question to the large group. When asked why we would welcome everyone to come to church to worship, he shouted, "Because we are the comma kids!"

In our planning we had several goals in mind.

1. Base materials on the national GISS campaign.
2. Include the campaign commercials.
3. Use active learning centers in a rotation model.
4. Develop activities geared for preschool through 5th grade.
5. Invite middle school and high school students to assist.
6. Provide study groups for adults to encourage parents and other adult members to participate in a multi-generational family experience. (The pastor from each church would lead one evening of adult Bible study.)
7. Offer activities that adults and children would share.
8. Include GISS identity items: commas, stickers, banks, tattoos, t-shirt logos, balloons, banners, posters.
9. Use two Bible stories to study. (Lost Coin, Samuel)
10. Incorporate a theme a night: Welcome, Celebrate, Called
11. Prepare materials for all sessions ahead of time to make it easier for the teachers and shepherds to carry out their responsibilities.
12. Light a fire in the hearts of the participants to enable them to learn and live the message of God is still speaking,

Setting the environment was important to us to establish a visual message of the GISS Initiative. To do this, we used several GISS materials from our churches.

1. The large outdoor GISS banner was hung on the entry patio railing.
2. GISS framed posters were displayed near the registration table.
3. GISS balloons and scarves decorated the registration table.
4. Comma shapes were used for name tags.
5. Red poster board door hangers were made.
6. GISS T-shirt decals were ironed on shirts.
7. Comma stickers were given out on the first and third nights.
8. GISS tattoos were put on as students arrived the third night.
9. GISS banks were distributed.
10. Comma banners were created for each church.
11. Red, white, and black bracelets were made the first night.
12. Invitation to participate and registration form was printed on red paper and had a front page cut in the shape of a comma.
13. A GISS canvas bag was used during game sessions.
14. Adult leaders were encouraged to wear GISS t-shirts.

We celebrate the exciting and inspiring time spent together. We invite others to try our ideas and develop new ideas. We encourage all churches to share the great adventure of the God is still speaking, identity campaign with their young people. Including the children and youth in this very important time in the United Church of Christ is evidence that we are indeed listening to God's message.

Please feel free to contact us to ask questions and to share ideas. We hope to see this project bloom.

Your friends in Christ,

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