

'Creation Vacation' provides break for cash-strapped families

Program provides free, four-day summer vacations away from the city for families who couldn't otherwise afford one

United Methodists in Portland, Oregon, believe everyone needs a break now and then. So they're helping families who are struggling to make ends meet and don't have the funds for a little fun.

Through "Creation Vacation," the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference provides free, four-day summer camps away from the inner city for families who couldn't otherwise afford it.

Thanks to the effort, on a warm, breezy day at Rockaway Beach, on the Oregon coast, **Andrea Justice** enjoyed a vacation with her two sons. "To be able to play with them, and that's all we have to do—we don't have to work or anything else—it's good," she said.

It's her first vacation since she became a mom almost four years ago. "I'm paying my bills every month with my check," she said, "so, when it comes around to vacation time, there's no way to go." Justice, who works in a bank mailroom, added, "At the end of the month, I'm broke."

That's why the camps are planned at month's end, when food stamps and money often run low. It's a common problem in Oregon, which claims the highest rate of unemployment and hunger in the United States.

"Families who live in poverty struggle every day, just to make ends meet," said **Rochelle Killett**, director of Creation Vacation.

The conference is conducting four camps this summer at two Conference sites—Camp Magruder and Wallowa Lake Camp—for families from Portland, Salem and Ontario in Oregon and Nampa, Idaho.

Ice cream tastes best at camp!

At each camp, families enjoy a time of relaxation, recreation and renewal in a lake or forest setting, chosen for its natural beauty. Along with providing a break from city noise and pollution, the settings reinforce the need to be good stewards of all creation.

The gift of a vacation experience includes bus transportation, lodging in a separate room for each family, healthy food and snacks, camp support staff services, the help of volunteer staff, craft resources, insurance, bedding and personal items, and disposable cameras and film developing.

Families enjoy a range of activities, including swimming, boating, beach play, donkey rides, variety shows, campfires, crafts and hikes. Each camp has an operating budget of \$10,000 and depends on donations from various sources, including Peace with Justice offerings and businesses, churches and individuals.

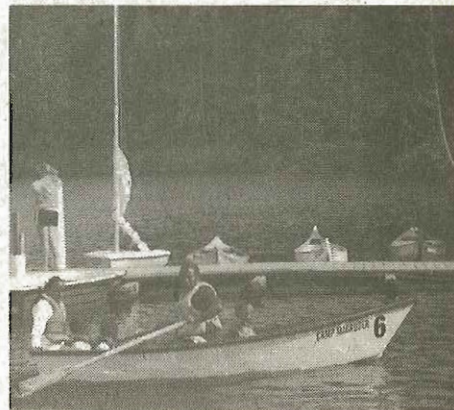
"Family friends"—volunteers recruited from churches and the camp community—help make the vacation go smoothly and ensure that the families' needs are respected. These new friends provide orientation, scheduling of activities or even babysitting, so parents get some quiet time.

The vacation experience has benefited families beyond the time spent at camp, according to a survey conducted after the 2000 camps. At least half the families who had taken part in the Creation Vacation program reported increased time together as a family, and closer relationships and bonding among family members.

"Families are falling apart in this country," Killett said. "This is a way for our church to strengthen them."

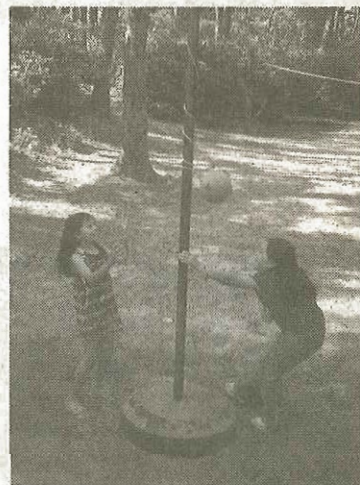
The conference initiated Creation Vacation in 1997 with a single camp for 17 families from northeast Portland. This year, 100 families will enjoy a break at the four camps.

— **Nancye Willis**
United Methodist News Feature



A first boat ride for one family at Camp Magruder.

LISA JEAN HOEFNER PHOTOS



Two girls attending Creation Vacation at Camp Magruder enjoy a game of tetherball.

To learn more about Creation Vacation, visit www.gocamping.org or www.umtv.org.