



Faith-Based Volunteer Programming at SSP

Sierra Service Project
11.11.21

SSP's Approach to Spiritual Programs

- *Discovery, not delivery*
- We do not evangelize
- We can extend an invitation, but do not control the response
- All cultures and spiritual practices offer wisdom
- Embracing the divine as something already present inside of each person - giving participants the agency to explore that (or not) on their own terms
- Rooting our reflections in both an individual and collective spirituality (our liberation is wrapped up in one another's)
- Application to real life
- Affirming while encouraging growth beyond comfort zone
- Up-front about our theology and inclusion statements



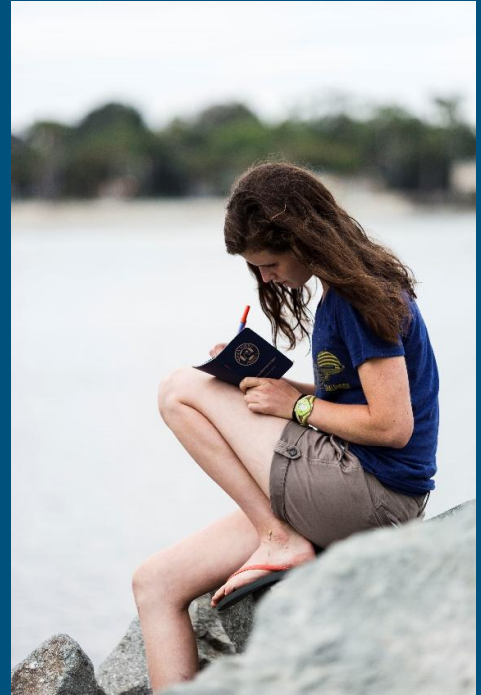
Five Key Objectives of SSP's Spiritual Program:

1. The joys of community
2. Youth empowerment
3. Greater self-esteem
4. A better understanding of the Christian narrative and its application to our lives
5. Strengthening of local youth ministry



Who develops it?

- Each year, a team of pastors, youth leaders, and program staff & alumni gather in the winter & early spring to develop the foundation of that summer's spiritual program:
 - *"What do youth (and people in general) need to hear right now?"*
 - *"How does the lens of the Christian narrative inform our way of being in the world?"*
 - *"How is the Jesus story present in the lives of volunteers, homeowners, and community members?"*
- The program's thematic structure is designed, then passed to staff for implementation.
 - *The planning team supports with suggested scriptures (from a variety of translations), an activity resource bank, scriptural context, etc.*
- Starting in late spring, YA program staff (Spiritual Life Coordinators) develop the activities, prompts, and program details correlated with the theme.



Inviting Volunteers into Discussion & Practice

- *Discovery, not delivery*
- Train staff in working with specific age groups and in Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Model transparency & (appropriate) vulnerability
- Mutual invitation (group sharing practice)
- Open-ended questions
 - “Why” and “how” questions elicit most reflection
- Model accessible starting points:
 - *Lectio divina*
 - *Breath prayers*
 - *Sensory prayers*



Homeowners

- Offer service freely, without expectation
- Homeowners are invited to weekly community dinners, and often interact with volunteers at site informally.
- Often disconnected from our spiritual program components, but welcome.
- Homeowners might be part of sharing about the community's history and traditions during evening program.

Various Beliefs

- Many participants are agnostic, atheist, or spiritual but not religious, along with other non-Christian faith identities (less represented).
- Each week, the Spiritual Life Coordinator opens with sharing what kind of language they'll be using. They validate that others may use different language to express their feelings about faith, and that's okay.

