



PATHWAY

WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries

»» Advocacy Camp for Children ««

»» ADVOCACY CAMP FOR CHILDREN, CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, WACO, TX

While serving at Calvary Baptist Church, Jennifer Adams, a Baylor School of Social Work intern at the time, helped the church engage in ministry to its community. She saw a need to help the children, not just the adults, be more aware of community needs and learn how they could be a part of making a difference.

Jennifer had been an active member of Calvary since 2001. She chose to do her internship at Calvary in 2007 because of the church's commitment to serving its diverse, inner-city neighborhood. After discussing her idea of holding an Advocacy Camp for children with the Missions Minister, Children's Minister, other pastoral and lay leaders, parents, and children, her dream became a reality. The week-long camp is geared for children in third through sixth grade, and it is designed to help them become aware of different populations and needs. The children participate in different activities, volunteer service, and lessons that provide a biblical basis for helping.

Goals of the ministry

Advocacy Camp was designed to serve the children and their families as well as the community and populations who would benefit from their advocacy. The goals of this ministry are:

For the children and their families:

- Learn about God's calling for all to serve and care for others, especially those in need
- Learn about social justice issues
- Discover what advocacy is and how they can be advocates for others
- Begin to develop more diverse relationships
- Provide an opportunity for children within their families and the church
- Offer a safe environment for children to dialogue about difficult issues

For the community and beyond:

- Raise awareness about different community service organizations
- Provide volunteers
- Raise awareness about community issues
- Encourage collaboration and community among diverse individuals, congregations, and community organizations

Funding the ministry

The camp was provided at no cost to the campers to encourage involvement. Initial funding for Advocacy Camp came from the money budgeted for the Children's Ministry. Costs were minimal as it was a half-day camp, volunteers provided the teaching and most of the activities involved service. After the success of the first Advocacy Camp, Jennifer was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to fund the camp in the future at Calvary.

Recruiting volunteers

A seminary student from another church was doing an internship with Calvary's Children's Minister that same year. This student decided to get her church involved with Advocacy Camp as well, and the camp became a partnership between the two churches. Jennifer and the other student recruited volunteers to help with the camp through personal connections. They talked with people in their congregations who they knew enjoyed working with children, were committed to educating about social justice, or who were connected to different community organizations. Volunteers were needed to help teach lessons, lead activities, transport children to different service sites, speak about different issues, and share from their personal experiences. There was no training required for volunteers but background checks were required since they would be working with children.

MORE ON BACK

» Advocacy Camp for Children «**Structure of the program**

Every day the children were taught lessons about the biblical basis for helping and about different needs people have, participated in some type of activity, and engaged in a service opportunity. For example, the children spent one day the first year learning about hunger. That day they learned about the biblical mandate to feed the hungry and about the number of people living in hunger and what resources are and are not available for them. Another member of the church talked about how they could write letters to encourage the government to take care of people who are hungry and led the children in a Bread for the World Offering of Letters. The children also helped deliver Meals on Wheels.

During the second year of Advocacy Camp, the leaders chose to focus on one issue all week long – early childhood education. Throughout the week, they learned about advocacy in general, but they also learned many of the specifics about why early childhood education is important and about the large number of children who do not have access to it. On Friday, the children took a trip to Austin to hear from staff members of a group in Austin who lobby on behalf of early childhood education, tour the state Capitol, and speak to representatives about the importance of helping all have access to early childhood education. The children also delivered letters that they had written about this issue. The trip to Austin was one of the ways that the camp broadened to invite family members to participate.

Promoting the program to the community

The camp was geared for families already in one of the churches involved. Planners advertised in the weekly church newsletter, announcements in the worship folder, and flyers that were handed out to children and parents in Sunday School. Jennifer also talked personally with parents to tell them about Advocacy Camp and to encourage them to have their children participate. In the first year, many of the children come from families where both parents work, so child care and transportation were problems. In the second year of the camp, the church provided transportation to child care sites at the end of the camp day and participation increased.

Program as evangelism

Advocacy Camp is an excellent opportunity for children to learn about what it means to live out the Gospel message of Jesus. The children learned how to share the love of Jesus by caring for others through advocacy. All of the lessons were tied to Scripture, and the children were encouraged to pray for people who are hurting.