

Resource Resource Resource: **Conferences, Festivals, and Workshops**

“Where do you get your material?” people often ask. Beacon Street created some over the years. Some was just laying around waiting to be put to a good creative, ministry-related use. And other material, well, we steal it. We watch other professionals, see what we really like, and take it. We give loads of credit, mention the artist by name, and then give it our own special spin. But the seeds come from the hand of another master, and this year Bob went to where they were. Office manager Pat Hannon was very deliberate about keeping a couple weekends free from programming.

In early May, Bob went to the Annual Recreation Workshop in Montreat NC, home of the Conference Center for the Presbyterian Church. A long-time friend, Glenn Bannerman, had been after Beacon Street to come to ARW for ages. He was sure that what we did would please the folks and we would find ourselves on the staff in no time. Beacon Street first encountered Glenn in the early 80’s when this indefatigable master of shenanigans would warm up a crowd in the am or keep then square dancing in the pm. There isn’t anything a crowd wouldn’t do for Glenn.

Bob went shopping for “activities.” Beacon Street is often asked to provide five or more hours of programming for junior and senior high students. Because we believe that experience is often the best teacher, we are always on the lookout for activities that will invite students to be themselves when having think quickly, plan collectively, or act spontaneously. Reflecting back on the experience gets right to the point, and participants are more likely to remember the experience for a while.

ARW is a five-day training experience in Recreation Ministry. It is designed for pastors, educators, church instructors or anyone interested in recreation leadership. The conference features daily worship, barn dancing, evening programs, bookstore, auction, and short courses for special interest groups. Oh, and you can have grits for breakfast. Best of all, you meet remarkable people who are applying these skills weekly in all parts of the country.

Bob signed up for the Group Team-building

workshop for the morning session and Adventure Games for the afternoon. Kenny Shackelford (www.victoryranch.org/outdoor.html) facilitated the am for about twenty-five of us. We were like kids again playing with foam Frisbees, mountain-climbing rope, hula-hoops, playground balls, and even a parachute. We formed circles, lines, squares, and pyramids. We moved quickly when the clock was running and hardly at all when puzzles were to be solved. The dynamic was so pleasant that even an introvert found himself diving in with reckless abandon. Bob learned a lot.

The afternoon experience, as Bob recollects now, was planned for people in their early 20’s. He smelled Ben Gay the second day. Tools of the trade were swimming pool noodles, clothespins, Frisbees, bottled water, and running shoes. If he ever finds himself with 30 middle school students for a week, he’ll know just what to do. Other workshops offered this year and a thorough Resource page can be found on the web site (www.recreationworkshop.org/MainPage.html). The cost included room and board at the Conference Inn, nestled among beautiful mountains in western NC. Next year’s 52nd ARW conference will be held from Monday to Saturday, May 2-7. It’s worth looking into.

On Father’s Day weekend Bob attended the Laughs Festival in Loudoun County VA. (www.laughsfestival.org) There were six national storytellers there. Bob was willing to travel to see and hear the three he knew: Elizabeth Ellis, Diane Ferlatte, and Ed Stivender. To have met the others (Willy Claflin, Bill Lepp, and Carmen Agra Deedy) and been enthralled by their artistry was more than he had hoped for.

Some of these professionals told old tales with a new twist. Some used a banjo, a mandolin, or a harmonica. More than one puppet spoke into the microphone. One teller in particular, Bill Lepp, was introduced as a “five-time winner of the West Virginia Liars Contest.” He would shove his hands deep in his pockets, lean back and start spinning a tale in a most believable manner. Bob swallowed every word, perhaps because Bill was a Methodist pastor for five years!