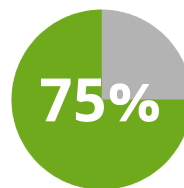


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Vanga Summer Bible Camps




ED & MIRIAM NOYES



SUPPORT PLEDGED





DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Over the past 3 years something remarkable has happened in the Vanga area, about 300 miles due east of Kinshasa on the Kwilu River. Joseph Musa, the Baptist childrens' ministries coordinator for the district, has been holding childrens' Bible camps in different pools of village churches of the district. His team invites children and young people from 5-10 villages to a central site, often a church-run school. They organize a program similar to Vacation Bible School that lasts 3-5 days. Last summer they held camps in 3 sites: Lemfu, in mid July, Kilusu, in late July, and Mawanga in August. About 780 kids from a total of 22 churches participated. Children get terribly excited. A Bible camp is often the first time anyone has focused just on them. Many kids come from large hard-working families where parents have little time to give each child personal attention.



"Pick me! Pick me!" Children participating in a 3-4 day Bible Camp enthusiastically vie to be the first to give answers in a Bible quiz. This camp was held at one of the Baptist schools near Vanga.



Organizers of the 2017 Vanga Bible Camp expected 250 kids. They didn't have the heart to turn anyone away when 450 showed up.

Contributions to IM's Congo Summer Bible Camps project enable Bible camps to happen in three ways. First, funds help organizers to provide meals for children. School vacation and Bible camps happen during the hungry season when stored foods stocks dwindle. Families often don't eat regularly, scrimping to get through to the next harvest. Parents of campers send a small contribution of basic food stuffs with each child. It is often meager fare but it's hard to spare more. Our contributions make make the difference, enabling the children to eat 3 times a day while they are in Bible camp. Second, the project helps the team to hire a jeep to transport the team, supplies and audio-visual equipment to the site. Vehicular transportation on our rural dirt roads is quite expensive. Third, our contributions inject something special to spice up the Bible camps. Camp staff can make daily videos of activities and show Christian films in the evening. Many village kids have never seen a film. Seeing a video of themselves and each other doing stuff is great fun. Contributions help to bring the pieces together and add a bit of spice. But the success of Bible camps comes from the heart and inventiveness that the volunteer camp staff bring: games, Bible stories, listening to children and talking with them.

You would recognize the teaching part of their Bible camp: the assembly in the morning with the main message of the camp, the Bible stories, the small discussion groups, the prayer

times and games sprinkled in. After lunch there is quiet time, when individual kids can talk quietly with a counselor while most kids are resting. In the late afternoon after quiet time and soccer, the kids have chores: typically finding firewood or carrying water for the kitchen, before baths at the local stream or river and supper. After supper they might have a Bible or Christian film or camp videos, before devotions and announcements and bed on the woven mat they brought from home.



Vanga Bible camp kids crowd around a television for a night-time showing of Bible story videos.

The particularly fun parts for Congolese kids? The choir-“majorette” competitions during the assemblies, the soccer games, the other games like “hawk-and-chickens”, and seeing yourself and your friends on video.

Most of our rural churches are desperately poor, pared down to the most basic activities. It’s not surprising that children’s ministry has gotten short shrift over the past 20 odd years. Even having Sunday school for kids is not very common. Our support of VBS programs in Congo allows people like Joseph to reintroduce the idea to the churches. We hope that a taste of VBS will inspire individuals and churches to organize small VBS day programs for their own kids. That is exactly what happened in the town of Vanga following the 2016 Bible camps. The Vanga district head pastor wants to continue VBS as a separate program for kids, added to the established program of dry season retreats for the district’s churches. More power to them!

This summer 4 Bible camps are planned in new areas, sowing more seeds and encouraging Congolese Christians with a heart for children to experiment with expanding this ministry.



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