



Movie/Video Study

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Jesus Camp

PG-13
A&E Indie Films

(Printer friendly [PDF version](#))

Introduction

The documentary film **Jesus Camp** was released in September 2006. The film gives viewers a look at Pastor Becky Fischer's children's ministry. The focal point of her ministry is the "Families on Fire Summer Camp" that she leads every summer. As the film progresses we also meet three children who are active in Pastor Becky's ministry: Levi, Rachael, and Tory. The main characters are all charismatic, evangelical Christians who are passionate about her faith. Some of the images in the film might cause viewers to pass immediate judgment or be uncomfortable. Encourage your group to approach the film with an open mind.

Resources

There are many resources available on-line that will help give leaders and youth various perspectives about this movie. Please review them carefully if you are considering using any of them with youth. Some may contain content more suitable for adults (i.e., YouTube and Google Video clips). Here are a few:

- **Jesus Camp Official Movie Web site** (<http://www.jesuscampthemovie.com/>)
- **Wikipedia description: Jesus Camp** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Camp)
- **Jesus Camp movie information** (International Movie Database) (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0486358/maindetails>)
- **Pastor Becky Fischer's responses** to Jesus Camp publicity questions: Kids in Ministry, International (<http://www.kidsinministry.com/Pg1MagnoliaQA.html>)
- **Jesus Camp review:** Christian Spotlight on Entertainment (ChristianAnswers.Net) (<http://christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/2006/jesuscamp2006.html>)

- **YouTube video clips about Jesus Camp** (some may contain material more suitable for mature adult audiences) (<http://www.youtube.com/>)
(http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Jesus+Camp&search=Searchand)
 - **Google Video clips about Jesus Camp.** (some may contain material more suitable for mature adult audiences) (<http://video.google.com/>)
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Topic #1: Religion and politics

On multiple occasions in the film the subject of politics and religion are brought up. Children smash porcelain coffee cups with “government” written on the cups. Mike Papantonio (the talk radio host) talks about the separation between church and state. A prayer about abortion is offered at breakfast. One of the adult leaders said, “the government came into your schools and took Jesus out of your school.” Children pray words of blessing over a cardboard cutout of President Bush. Cries of “righteous judges” echoed through the crowd on the last night of camp in the hopes of an anti-abortion judge being appointed to the Supreme Court.

What does the Bible say?

- [Mark 12:13-17](#)
- [Isaiah 9:6](#)
- [Revelation 11:15](#)

Discussion Questions

1. How can Christians approach hot political issues that sometimes divide people?
2. How can Christians be on opposite ends of political and social issues?
3. Do you agree with the political views of the children and adults in the film?
4. What are your feelings about the “separation of Church and State”?

ELCA resources for approaching discussions about difficult topics:

- **"Risking Difficult Discussions"** <http://www.elca.org/youth/resource/riskydiscussions.html>
 - **"Talking Together as Christians About Tough Social Issues"**
http://www.elca.org/ethics/pdf/Talking_Together_as_Christians_mr.pdf
 - **"Talking Together as Christians Cross Culturally"**
http://www.elca.org/ethics/pdf/tt_christians_cross_culturally.pdf
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TOPIC #2: “Dead churches”

Young Rachel had some pointed words about churches that are “quiet” and “boring.” She says, “God is not in every church. There are some churches called dead churches. Churches that God likes to go to are jumping up and down praising his name. Depending on how they invite him, he’ll be there or not.” Some people see this as an indictment of mainline churches, like Lutheran churches. Few ELCA congregations offer the kind of worship experiences shown in the movie. Most are more subdued, or “dead” by Rachel’s standards and convictions.

What does the Bible say?

- [Revelation 3:11-16](#)
- [Matthew 6:1-13](#)
- [John 4:22-24](#)

- [Matthew 18:20](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of Rachael's comments?
2. Should "traditional" Lutherans feel obligated to liven things up? What should be the focus of our worship?
3. How does the Revelation verse make you feel? How about the Matthew verses?

Activity Suggestion

Take a piece of poster board and divide it into two columns. Title one column: "Ways in Which Our Church is Alive." Title the other column: "Ways in Which Our Church is Dead." Take some time to discuss some of the traditions, practices, activities, programs, and rituals in your local congregation. Talk about the meaning, sources, and questions behind them. Consider sharing this list with your pastor(s) and worship committee.

Helpful resources for this discussion can be found at:

- **What Do Lutherans Believe?** <http://www.elca.org/communication/brief.html>
- **"Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"** <http://www.elca.org/communication/faith.html>
- **Frequently asked worship questions** <http://www.elca.org/worship/faq/index.html>

Remember, this is not an activity for shredding the church and everything that it does, or comparing it to a church that you envy. The purpose is to reflect on what you do and why, with the intent of striving to be faithful in all of your witness and practices.

TOPIC #3: What's an *evangelical*?

Mike Papantonio talks a lot about the evangelical movement. Several of the statistics that are mentioned reference evangelicals. This term—*evangelical*—might be confusing to members of the EVANGELICAL Lutheran Church in America ([ELCA](#)). On the whole, ELCA outdoor ministries and congregations don't function in the same way as the camps and congregations shown in the film. There are at least two common uses of the word *evangelical*. One uses it in relationship to any Protestant Christian church whose members believe in the authority of the Bible and salvation through Jesus Christ by faith. Another use of the term *evangelical* refers to being enthusiastic or charismatic in sharing one's Christian faith and beliefs with the hope that others will come to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as well.

What does the Bible say?

- [Acts 16:30-31](#)
- [Matthew 28:16-20](#)
- [Isaiah 63:15](#)
- [Romans 10:1-4](#)

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the difference between the two definitions of *evangelical*? Which definition applies to your church?
2. What do you feel that you have in common with the people in the film? What differences are there between you and those portrayed in the film?

3. What do you think is the “best” way to go and make disciples? Is it the only way? Why?
 4. Do you consider yourself an evangelical Christian? Why or why not?
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TOPIC #4: Speaking in tongues

The gift of speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift described several times in the Bible (see below). When someone is speaking in tongues it sounds like indecipherable babble to most people. However, those who speak in tongues believe that it is the language of the Holy Spirit moving through them. It can be very confusing and even frightening to be around someone who is speaking in tongues, especially for people who have never had the experience. Many faithful Christians go their entire life without speaking in tongues. Others, like the Christians portrayed in the film, speak in tongues so frequently that it’s almost like a second language.

What does the Bible say?

- [Mark 16:16-18](#)
- [Acts 10:45-46](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:27-13:1](#)
- [1 Corinthians 14](#)

Discussion Questions

1. How would you respond if you were sitting next to someone in worship who started speaking in tongues?
 2. Have you ever spoken in tongues? Do you think you ever will? Why?
 3. How do you know if the person speaking in tongues is really channeling the Holy Spirit and not just doing it to show off or fit in?
 4. In what other ways does the Spirit work in us and reveal God's presence and work?
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TOPIC #5: How do I respond?

The film Jesus Camp evokes a variety of emotions in viewers. It has been hotly debated among religious and secular groups since the film was released in September 2006. Some Christians respond to this film with anger. Others respond with judgment, calling Pastor Becky and the children crazy or strange. Still others might be curious about the evangelical movement and what it is all about. If you’re wondering how Pastor Becky responded to the film, she is supportive of Jesus Camp and encourages people to see it. She views it as an evangelism tool that will spread her message to the world.

What does the Bible say?

- [Matthew 5:43-48](#)
- [Galatians 3:23-28](#)
- [Matthew 7:1-5](#)

Discussion Questions

1. Describe your emotions after watching the film.
2. What judgments or labels have you put on Pastor Becky and others?
3. Are there judgments or assumptions others place on you as a Lutheran Christian? Why or why not?

4. How does God call us to treat those who we disagree with?

Activity Suggestion

Consider visiting an Evangelical Free church (or similar church) as a group. After the service, discuss the similarities and differences between that church and your congregation. Also consider the similarities and differences between the church you visited and the church on Jesus Camp.

- How did this new worship experience make you feel?
- How does it feel to call the people you visited brothers and sisters in Christ?
- What are your experiences with other denominations or religions? What do you know about them?

Closing prayer

*God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to be open to the ways the Spirit moves in each of us. Give us open minds and hearts to discern your will for us, and for how we relate to others.
Amen*

Need to keep up with what movies are out there? Check these Web sites. Please note that some links will take you off of the ELCA site. Providing a link does not necessarily imply that an organization is affiliated with or supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

- [Rotten Tomatoes](#) (upcoming movies)
- [Crosswalk.com](#) (film review archive)
- [Internet Movie Database](#) (reviews, searchable database, upcoming movies)
- Return to [REEL WORLD Archive](#)
- [ELCA Youth Ministries home page](#)

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