

Economist &amp; Sun • Stouffville Tribune

# FAITH

Summer Bible schools expose people of all ages to different faiths

## Students seek summer spirituality

BY CAROL COOPER  
Special

An open tool box. A drill. A hammer. Scattered screws. These are Signs of preparation for Bethel Christian Reformed Church's Vacation Bible School running this week.

Youth Pastor George Lubbers and volunteers are constructing five study sites throughout the Newmarket church to illustrate the school's theme, Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon.

They include a treehouse in the balcony and a waterfall in the sanctuary.

At each stop on their tour of the "Amazon", guided by one of the program's 20 volunteers, the 120 children expected at the school hear a Bible story and discuss issues related to their jungle stopover.

"Our main goal is to provide an opportunity for our children to learn some of the Bible stories during the summer and then for our children to bring along neighbourhood friends and people that wouldn't normally go to church. So it's an evangelical outreach," Pastor Lubbers said.

These preparations are mirrored around York Region as summer day programs associated with churches, synagogues, mosques and temples prepare to teach religious stories, traditions and values to their young participants.

Camp Lubavitch, associated with Chabad Lubavitch Synagogue in Thornhill, exposes children to Judaism.

"We have many secular kids coming here and their parents would like them to have some experience with Judaism," said camp director Rabbi Mendel Bernstein.

The program, serving 600 children, presents an hour each day of integrated activities during the full-time, summer-long program teaching Jewish customs, traditions and laws.

"Our goal is obviously to make Judaism exciting and meaningful to children from all backgrounds. At the same time as they are learning, they'll also be having a fun

time," Rabbi Bernstein said.

Carmel Shaw cites exposure to values as the reason she is sending her two daughters to Bug Safari Vacation Bible School at Mount Albert United Church.

"Values are really important," said Ms Shaw, who is also the school's co-ordinator.

"At the Bible School, they are learning to get along with others and accept their differences. They are also learning to help others and the community and that they should be willing to give, not just to receive."

Of her leadership role with the school, Ms Shaw said, "It's a lot of fun and a chance to help out."

*It's so they can understand the purpose of life: to be a good person, kind to all human beings and animals and to fulfill the lives of parents, friends and everyone in contact with us.*

As well as receiving religious instruction during summer evenings, children associated with the Baitul Islam Mosque in Maple also participate in two major events, said Sheikh Abdul Hadi, national secretary ta'leem (education) for the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam in Canada.

Mosques across the country will each hold a gathering for the Organization of Young Ahmadiyya Muslims in early August for those aged seven to 40 years, including games and competitions.

The following week, Canadian mosques will each hold a national Ta'limul Qu'ran class. An average of 700 people of all ages, the majority of children and teenagers will attend at the Baitul Mosque alone, Mr. Hadi said. There they will be divided into classes, according to their ages.

"It's so they can understand the



STAFF PHOTO/ERIN RILEY

Youth Minister with the Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Pastor George Lubbers, sits with Eric McKenzie, 4, in one of the church's camp stations, Jungle Trek, which illustrates the theme of Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon.

purpose of life: to be a good person, kind to all human beings and animals and to fulfill the lives of parents, friends and everyone in contact with us," Mr. Hadi said.

"It's also to teach good habits. There are so many activities like drinking and smoking. We want children to be protected from these things."

While some parents send their children to religious day camps, 11-year-old Robert Revington of Aurora asked to go.

He missed out last year, but is now registered for the Vacation Bible School held jointly by St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Aurora and Trinity Anglican Church just down the street.

"Veggie Tales (the curriculum items) are funny," he said. "They (the Bible School) had good things for kids last year — puppets and arts and crafts. And there is a new Veggie Tales movie."

The Veggie Tales curriculum is the core of the Vacation Bible School at Knox United Church in Sutton. In addition, the 25 children in the week-long, half-day program will visit a retirement home and spend a day at the beach, according to Rev. Leslie Sedore. She and seven volunteers will lead the program.

"It's traditional and we feel it's a

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Ron Csillag

## 'God beat' really sells in United States

Your faithful scribe writes from Chicago, where he's attending Northwestern University's school of journalism to learn how to rite good.

Kidding aside, I am the lucky and very honoured recipient of a \$10,000 US scholarship to study religion writing; a one-of-a-kind summer course offered jointly by the university's journalism department and its Garrett Evangelical Seminary, the largest supplier of United Methodist pastors in the United States.

When you're a Canadian writer specializing in religion, faith issues and ethics and you look at your craft through an American prism, it doesn't take long to feel as though you just got off the bus from Dogpatch.

The craft is a growth industry here. More like booming.

There isn't a single mid-sized or large U.S. newspaper that does not pay attention to religion. The number of full-time religion reporters at papers is nearly 100, while part-timers are approaching 175. The Dallas Morning News alone has three full-time people on the beat.

Between the 1980s and '90s, the amount of religion news in America's elite media doubled. Even Time magazine, which once famously asked the question, "Is God Dead?" is now devoting cover stories to religion and they tend to sell out.

God is big news here. He has definitely made a comeback. I sometimes wonder whether He has hired a press agent.

Why all the holy ink over the past decade? America, we've heard, is in the grip of a religious revival unseen since the Great Awakening between

See AMERICA, page 16.

**July 1st**

**CANADA DAY FESTIVITIES 2002**

Come and join in the celebrations at Milne Park. Wear red and white Canada's colours. Free Canada Flags

Enjoy —

- Singers
- Dancers
- Entertainment
- Bands
- Steel Drums
- Kung Fu Demonstrations
- Special Hong Kong performers
- Old Navy contest, prizes and give-aways
- Face painting, games, races, prizes, clowns
- Refreshments, food, soft ice cream, freezies, snacks, drinks, Chinese food booth

Prizes for best-decorated bicycle decorate to celebrate Canada's birthday

**PEOPLE'S PARADE** — Gather at 3:30 pm. Parade starts at Heritage Rd. and McCowan and proceeds south to Milne Park (south of Hwy. #7). All groups welcome — come in national dress.

Upon arrival — Flag raising and singing of 'O Canada'. Entertainment follows. Fireworks at dusk.

Park your vehicles at Markville Shopping Centre, continuous bus shuttle between Markville and Milne until after fireworks.