

The Bluffer

Looking for Love in all the Right Places

Hot to Trot

This year's Karing Kids class played a game called lava river, based on a Bible story called Elisha and the Widow. The kids start from one tree and end up at another. The grass in between the trees is lava. If you step in the lava, you have to go back to the beginning. One person is blindfolded, and you have to work together as a team to get the blindfolded person across, but players can step on cones to safely cross the lava.

Afterward the team reflected on their strategy. "You should plan it out before starting," Levi said. Greta added, "You should listen to everyone's ideas before you start."

"Try different ideas even if they may not work," Zach advised. "More than one idea can work," Simon said. "When everyone helps, you can win a challenge," added Isaiah.

"You have to persevere through challenges," said Alexander. "Teamwork is very important to get something done," Caroline said. "We have to think about everyone's abilities, every time," Jamie chimed in. "You have to trust people," said Danny, the blindfolded player.



A conversation with Dr. Gina Hens-Piazza

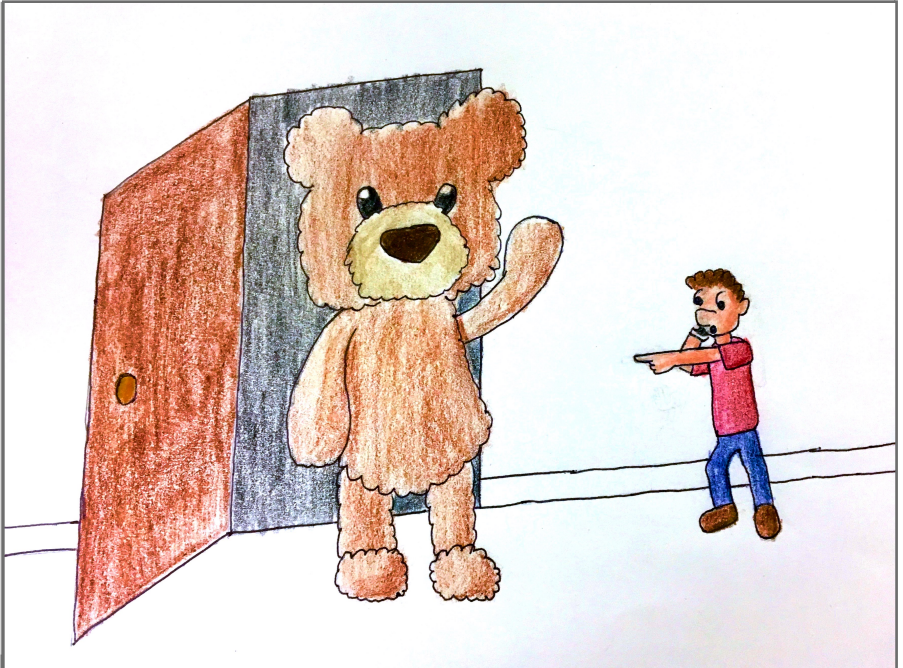
The Bluffer asked keynote speaker Dr. Gina Hens-Piazza about her message at this year's Summer Conference.

Hens-Piazza: The keynote theme all week is about reading the biblical texts in a way that is more inclusive. The purpose of that is to have us read the texts and not just see the big people—the Davids, the Solomons, the Peters, the Ruths, the Esthers, the people that we usually focus on.... And the basis for this is, as I said in our opening liturgy, Jesus seemed to be very fixed on the least. He said the least are first in the kingdom, he said greatness comes from becoming a servant, he said blessed are the poor, the hungry, the disenfranchised. So the prompt for looking at these "minor" characters in the Bible comes from Jesus and his teachings. And actually, before the conference, I spent some time with some of the folks planning the children's classes and we tried to plan classes with that same kind of focus, so I hope that some of that theme is coming through.

Bluffer: On Friday we saw that the Karing Kids class was playing a game which called for them to use teamwork to cross a river of lava. (See article.) They were connecting teamwork to the neighbors who gave the jugs in the story Elisha helps a Poor Widow. (2 Kings 4:1-7)

Hens-Piazza: Yeah, neighbors who donated the jugs, exactly—and the neighbors are only mentioned in that story once, so we can read past them. We can not even realize that they were the generous ones that donated the jugs for the miracle, or we can notice what a community does that often is anonymous, that they do out of generosity but never gets noticed.

Bluffer: What first inspired you to look into the overlooked characters in the Bible—or as you said in your keynote, the cameos?



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

If a giant teddy bear walked into your room, who would you call?

- ◆ My destructive dog
- ◆ The zoo
- ◆ Bill Zuelke
- ◆ A stuffing company
- ◆ Mike Hughes
- ◆ No one (the plurality)
- ◆ I'd just give it a hug
- ◆ Teddy-busters

The Bluffer is:

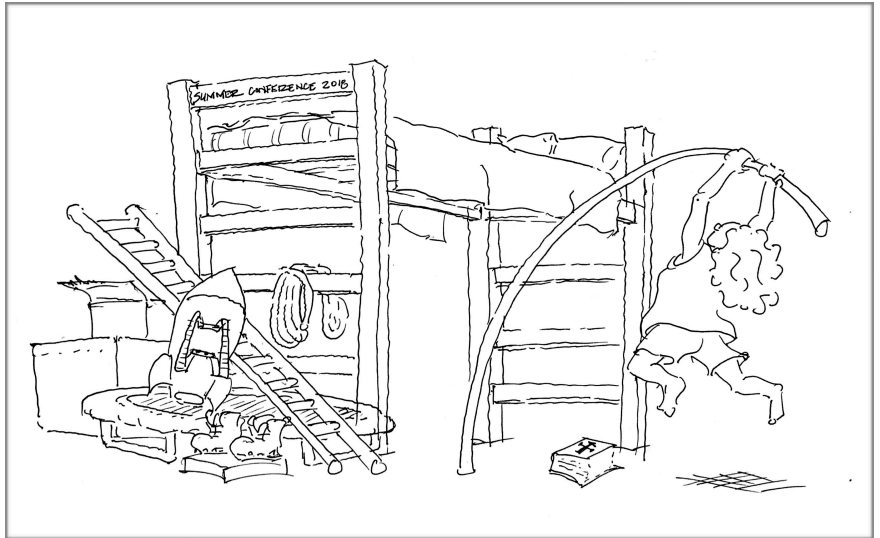
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Hens-Piazza: I think a couple things came together. First of all, my own wondering of where Jesus came up with the idea that he is featuring the least, the lesser, the social outcast, the Samaritan, the Prodigal Son—why Jesus always focuses on the downtrodden.... He is always quoting from the law and the prophets, so I know he knew his scriptures well. So I started to wonder if maybe he read his scriptures differently than I did. I think another prompt for this was that years ago, I wrote a commentary on the books of Kings. And I was aware as I wrote about the kings, there were all these other characters in these stories that I had to ignore. And they were people who were in the service of kings, that if they had not been in the service of kings, there would be no Kings. I started to think that perhaps they had stories as well that were more inspiring and more important and more revelatory than these stories of kings, most of whom were very evil. I think the other thing that was important to me is in my own life I also work as a physicians assistant in a clinic, very part-time—my first job is my teaching. But I work with underserved people and I am constantly hearing stories of people who do very hard, great things that will never be seen, that are sort of invisible in our world; they won't be written up in newspapers. And these people



Dr. Gina Hens-Piazza goes to bed.

inspire me.... So I think these three things coming together—Jesus's teachings, my work on the Book of Kings, and some of the people I'm privileged to serve in clinic who do very great things that are invisible—have prompted me to look at these minor characters in a more prolonged way and discover what heroes are there, what virtue is disclosed, what greatness resides there that I don't think we can afford to miss. ■

Food for Thought

There are many people who make our lives easier. As we walked through the cafeteria, we decided to find out more about the cafeteria helpers, because they make our lives better. The first one we went up to was Hanna. I watched as she helped a soccer player through the salad bar. She talked with and smiled at the player. When we interviewed her we asked her why she chose this job and why she liked it. She said that she chose this job because she can turn someone's neutral experience into a positive one. She can make someone's day by serving their food. She also enjoys talking and smiling with the customers. Then we asked Kyle, who was chopping meat for the next night, why he likes his job. "Because everyone needs food, and if I know how to cook, I can go everywhere and cook," he said. We tried the meat the next night, it was delicious. These people have helped make our life and our Summer conference better. Sometimes we take these people for granted, even though we could not have had the same awesome experience that we did without them. We should thank them!

What Brought You to Summer Conference?

Every year Summer Conference greets a host of returning families and individuals looking to reconnect at this yearly event. And every year there are new faces as well. *Bluffer* staff spent some time talking with this year's attendees, new and returning, to find out some of the things that call us to come here.

Elsie Hjorth: "I come back to Summer Conference each year because my friends are here."

Gillian Blaufus: "I come for the food!"

Levi Kohler: "I like it because I get to play around with my friends."

Amy Blaufus: "I am here for the spiritual growth. I was reluctant to go, because this is only my second year, but I knew I needed spiritual growth so I came here."

Simon Vanderwal: "I learned about Family Camp from the Barsottis, and I like that there is so many activities."

Daniel Schaller: "I heard about camp from a friend and I think I'll come back next year."

Lee Golden: "I came so I could spend more time with my grandchildren and I like the fellowship and the good people in this community."

Dolores Golden: "I like the feeling of community and spending special time with friends and family."

Hubert and Kathy Chan: "To keep my relationship with people at camp and it's a really good Catholic community."



Wanted: For having 3 root beer floats and going for more.

Julie Ferrari: "I love the community of Summer Conference and I enjoy building my faith during the conference."

Catherine Conroy: "I come for the people and conversations."

Mary Willis: When Mary first started coming in 1992, she had a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old. She says she keeps coming back because she feels it really helps her grow spiritually and she enjoys the intellectual conversations about faith. "There's a lot of love in this community and there's really nothing else like Summer Conference."

Sukey Schaller: Sukey says she likes playing in the classroom with her mom the most.