



**Christian
Leadership
Conferences**

**YMCA
RAG / LEATHER PROGRAM
STARTER KIT**

Revised 10/14

The materials compiled in this folder have been gathered with the intention of helping you start or facilitate your YMCA's Rag/Leather Program. Among the following you will find the history and traditions of the program as well as mechanical, organizational and material ordering information.

These pages will give you only a brief view of the YMCA Rag/Leather Program. Further training and information can always be obtained at the Christian Leadership Conferences. Dates and locations of these as well as more program information and materials to copy can be found at <http://www.christianleadershipconf.org>.

Please call upon me with any questions or needs you may have.

Terra Lynn Dearth, Director
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The Story Of The Rag

The YMCA's Rag Program was started in 1914 by Thomas Caldwell of the Oakland YMCA. Caldwell was looking for a way to deal with certain camp discipline problems in a positive rather than negative way. One method used by many Y Camps was the presentation of awards for participation in athletics and other activities. Caldwell considered this, but the idea was discarded because a crippled boy was attending camp and would be unable to win an award under this system. Instead, Caldwell conceived the idea of giving awards for character attributes such as good health habits, promptness, cheerfulness, morals, trust and helpfulness. To symbolize these positive qualities, Caldwell bought some very simple blue bandanas he called "Rags". This was to signify that alone they had no value - rather, they were just a symbol of positive qualities the person had demonstrated. During an evening campfire program, Caldwell called several of the boys forward, and as he tied the rag around each boy's neck, he told him and the camp why he was receiving it. And, thus, a tradition started.

Over the years, many changes have occurred in the Rag Program; and many important YMCA leaders have helped strengthen and improve its original idea. Today the program is known as the YMCA Rag / Leather Program. Many different events and even some controversy have been a part of the Program over its 95 years of existence. The concept of "award" has changed over the years to a philosophy that Rags are challenges - not to be "given" but to be "accepted". These challenges have been added so that there are now three Leather and seven Rag steps. These are designed to provide new challenges as one grows and matures.

The Leathers and Rags can be as meaningful for youth as it is for adults, and continues to be an effective tool for counseling and motivation towards positive change.

The YMCA Rag / Leather Program

The YMCA Rag / Leather Program is one of the most effective tools available to a YMCA leader. It is designed to help youth and adults take a closer look at themselves in relationship to their own strengths and weaknesses, their religious beliefs and to those around them. It can be a major factor in creating an atmosphere in which positive change can take place.

The Leathers and Rags are outward symbols of the acceptance of inner challenges for Christian growth. Each Leather and Rag has a specific challenge and is accompanied by a personal challenge for growth developed by the individual.

The following tools are used to work with each participant:

- One-to-one counseling session
- Study cards
- Ceremony

The Order of the Rag / Leather Acceptance

Rag/Leather	Challenge	Minimum Age
Triangle		
Square	To grow in Body, Mind and Spirit.	14
	To grow, become a better friend and to keep good friends.	15
Circle	To become close to God through appreciation, love and concern for the earth that He has created.	16
		18
Blue	Loyalty to God, country and one's best self.	
Silver	Acceptance of or re-dedication to a Christian way of life or spiritual growth.	21
Brown	Christian service.	
Gold	Understanding, concern and acceptance of others.	
Red	Sacrifice of time, talent and personal will.	
Purple	A dedication towards excellence and noble living in all Christian Service Opportunities.	
White	Full-time Christian Service.	
	9	
	10	
	11	
	12	
	13	

YMCA Rag/Leather Program – Organizational Suggestions

Presentation

Total Camp -- very general explanation i.e. campfire closing with the "Story of the Rag," chapel story or explanation; after meal explanation; in the dining hall; Rag / Leather Program Rededication Ceremony (see next page)

Smaller group -- very general explanation i.e., by unit groups given by Rag / Leather Director, Unit Leader and / or counselor(s).

Appropriate times: Devotional, rest period, free time, cabin cleanup, on an overnight.

Set Up

In order to keep track of who is participating in the Rag/Leather Program, the number of people involved, when they've been counseled and are ready for a ceremony, the following is helpful.

Post 10 different pieces of paper in a central location. Each should contain the Leather or Rag at the top of each paper. The columns should be set up with the headings of; name, counselor and ready for ceremony.

Another piece of paper should be posted as to when the ceremonies will and meeting location.

Copies of the 10 different sign-up sheets can be given to the individual leaders who will be Conducting the ceremony.

YMCA Rag / Leather Program Re-Dedication Ceremony

Instructions:

This is not a part of the Ceremony and is not to be read aloud, but it should be studied carefully by all people who have parts in conducting the Ceremony.

Within the YMCA Rag / Leather Program there is a very close, inter-personal relationship with a strong emotional impact. Your sincerity in what you are doing and saying as you take part in the Ceremony and as you introduce the audience to the Program is an element which makes for a meaningful experience.

READING Persons with special parts speak loudly, clearly and slowly. As you prepare, if there are words which are unfamiliar to you, ask about them. Remember to speak in a warm, personal tone. Be sure to read your part over in advance several times so that you know what you are saying.

HOW WE LEARN We learn best by the "feeling" that moves between us, rather than by just what we say.

Explanations during the Ceremony appear in parenthesis and are not to be read aloud.

This Ceremony should be held at the first campfire or general session of the event and should include all campers and staff or attendees.

PERSONAL NECESSARY FOR THE RE-DEDICATION CEREMONY

Director – who conducts the presentation.
Ten Leather bearers / Ragers – randomly interspersed among the attendees.

YMCA Rag / Leather Program Re-Dedication Ceremony

1. History

The Rag Program began in 1914 at a YMCA summer camp in Oakland, California. At that time boys were chosen to receive a Rag based on health habits, promptness, cheerfulness, morals, trustworthiness and helpfulness.

The Rags were simple blue bandanas purchased at the local country store. The bandanas were called Rags to signify that alone they had no value. Rather, they were only a symbol of the positive qualities a camper had demonstrated.

In 1930 the Leather Program was developed for children under the age of 12 years. Leathers are similar to Rags, except geared to younger campers.

By the early 1950's YMCA's changed the focus of the program. No longer is a Rag or Leather given as a reward today. An individual can now accept a Leather or Rag to symbolize personal challenges that have been made by them to change and grow.

Over the years the YMCA Rag / Leather Program has developed into a series of 3 Leathers and 7 Rags, progressively designed to build character and promote personal and spiritual growth.

All first year participants 11 years and younger start begin the program with the Triangle.
All first year participants 12 years and older start with the Blue Rag.

2. Challenges

(A different person reads each one below and holds the particular Leather or Rag)

Triangle	A challenge to grow in Body, Mind and Spirit.
Square	A challenge to become a better friend and keep good friends.
Circle	A challenge to become closer to God through appreciation, love and concern for the earth that God has created
Blue Rag	A challenge of loyalty to God, country and one's best self.
Silver Rag	A challenge of acceptance of or re-dedication to a Christian way of life or spiritual growth.
Brown Rag	A challenge to Christian service.
Gold Rag	A challenge of understanding and concern for others.
Red Rag	A challenge to sacrifice of time, talent and personal will.
Purple Rag	A challenge towards excellence and noble living in all Christian service opportunities.
White Rag	A challenge for a life of full-time Christian service.

3. Challenges

Let us take a moment to remember our challenges that have been made and after we have done so put on our Leather or Rag to symbolize our re-uniting with those challenges.

4. Leathers Creed
(All readers)

I would strive to grow by keeping my body healthy and clean, by keeping my mind open and free, and by letting my spirit guide me. I would strive to do all three because each is equally a part of me.

5. Riggers' Creed
(All readers)

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.
I would be friend, to all – the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving and forget the gift;
I would be humble for I know my weakness;
I would look up and laugh and love and lift.

6. The next step is...
(Talk about agenda and how counseling and ceremonies
will take place and when)

YMCA Rag/Leather Program – Organizational Suggestions

Points

The points should be constructed at a special place away from camp as to more conducive to a serious atmosphere. There are two ways to construct points:

- A. One point for all three Leathers and one point for all seven Rags.
- B. One point for each three Leathers and one point for all seven Rags.

Time Line

A. Re-dedication

To be done the first day of camp or first general session of the event.

B. Presentation

To be done in the first two days of camp or during the first general session of the event.

C. Counseling

To be done by mid-session of camp or at all available free times of the event.

D. Ceremonies

To be done prior to two days to camp's end. No ceremonies should be done the last night or day of camp. If at another event should be conducted during free times or evenings.

Follow-up suggestions:

A. Maintain a Rag/Leather File

B. Have a 3 X 5 card with all the information on the individual's name, address, camp, Rag / Leather received, dates.

C. Have each person receiving a Leather and Rag write a letter to themselves regarding their challenges. These should be mailed in six months.

D. Organize a Riggers' Reunion during the year to reunite individuals with their challenges and renew friendships.

YMCA Rag/Leather Program – Mechanics Comments

Who should be in charge of the YMCA Rag/Leather Program in camp?

The Camp Director, designated Rag / Leather Program Director, key staff person should run the Rag / Leather Program in camp if possible. In a new camp, a co-director system could be very effective. They should also be an experienced leader of Christian beliefs.

The Camp Director should be in charge of the main thrust, not the mechanics. The director should set the tone and emphasis of the program and be visible. The program will not be as effective unless a permanent, high-ranking staff member leads and shares that they feel the program is important.

The Rag / Leather Program should be strongly supported by the administrative staff of the camp for it to be an effective program and be incorporated into the goals and objectives of the entire Camp Program. If the Camp Program Director does not have the time available to devote to effective handling of the Rag / Leather Program a staff member who is available that actively supports the purposes of the Rag / Leather Program and is also in charge of the Christian Emphasis for the entire Camp Program would be the ideal choice for leading the program. A committee structure is then very helpful in carrying out the details of the program. This may include the overall directing of the Rag / Leather Program, appointing a counselor from each unit in the camp and soliciting help from any other person in camp that shows great interest in the program. If an administrative assistant is used to keep the records of the program, they should also be included in this committee. The purpose of this committee should be the presentation of the Rag / Leather Program to the entire staff, to support campers in cabins who do not have a strong leader, help with problems that arise in the counseling process and organize the ceremonies and keep records.

Who should present the Rag / Leather Program and when? (To the counseling and permanent staff and to the campers).

If the Rag/Leather Program is to become an integral part of the camping program, the concept of the program should be introduced during the interviewing process for potential staff members. It is important that when looking for staff members, the Christian aspects of the YMCA Camping Programs are stressed so that counselors who are concerned with the spiritual side of the triangle, in addition to the physical and intellectual sides, are found to implement the Rag / Leather Program. Participation in a pre-camp Christian Leadership Conference for staff members also better prepares them for their role in the summer camp program. The Rag / Leather Program should then be presented during staff training as a major program area. The staff should be introduced to the program. The mechanics of how the program is offered and a chance to counsel and receive a Rag of their own should also be made available. This presentation can be made by the Rag / Leather Program Committee.

The person in charge should present the program to the staff during staff training and to the campers the first night of camp, during campfire, or at the first chapel. Counselors should then follow up in detail either that night or no later than the next day.

The program can first be presented to campers during the opening campfire or gathering of the session. This presentation might include a brief summary of the program, telling of the Rag Story or personal accounts from campers or counselors on what the program has meant to them. Follow up to the presentation can then be done during daily chapels, cabin devotions and personally by the counselor. (We have found that the program is only as effective as the enthusiasm of the individual counselor. That is why it is so important to keep the Rag/Leather Program in mind when hiring staff members).

Program Presentation

To Staff – during pre-camp training, before getting to camp and at camp staff training. (This should be handled by the Rag/Leather Program Director and Camp Director to emphasize

that the program is "Coming from the top").

To Campers - ASAP, i.e. first chapel, first campfire or a special activity. (This should be presented by the Rag / Leather Program Director and possibly campers and staff to get more of the "Buy-in" from all.

What handouts would be most helpful? (For the counselors and campers both).

Counselors need handouts. Staff need to have the challenges, how the program works, and a copy of each Leather Ceremony, lots of material on counseling and history of the program.

A section on the Rag / Leather Program in the staff manual is most helpful. This would include a copy of the Rag Story, a simple explanation of the Rag / Leather Program that includes a listing of the colors and shapes and their major emphasis or guidelines for establishing challenges, Rag Counseling for the Non-Christian and guidelines for one-to-one counseling, timeline of the camp and how the program fits into the week or weeks.

Campers should have study cards available. Office supplies should also be available for campers to write a letter to themselves. (Paper and envelopes) The camp should also provide postage for mailing the letters.

Should there be a YMCA Rag / Leather File Card on each person who receives one? If so, what information should it contain?

Yes, for both the Leathers and Rags. This should include name, address, specific Leather or Rag, which camp they received it at, who counseled them and what date it was received. There should also be a card kept for each ceremony to note the type of ceremony, who conducted it, participants' names and their challenges. A proper evaluation of the program cannot be made if proper records are not maintained.

Rag / Leather Program Files should be kept at the Camp Office if different than camp. By many hands being responsible for different groups, the continuity and business-like fashion in which this should be handled is usually lost. When files are kept by the Camping Office there is one location and one person in charge of follow-through and the updating of information. The information in the files needs to have each Leather and Rag recipient's name, address, date of birth phone number, date of each Leather and Rag received and the person who counseled the individual.

If there is a Rag / Leather Program File, who keeps it and where?

One specific staff member who has a little extra time available, such as the Rag / Leather Program Director, Christian Emphasis Director, Camp Administrative Assistant or Director's Spouse. The records should be kept in the Camp Office. This person should also be in charge of giving out materials, planning ceremonies, getting information back, etc. A counselor would be hard pressed to find the time (usually 2-3 hours a week). The person could be changed yearly. The camp should also keep up a mailing list for the Rag / Leather Program.

How should the "Aims for Improvement" or "Challenge Sheet" or "Card" written by the Leather and Rag recipient be handled? Who should collect it? Should it be returned to the individual? If so, when and by whom?

This should be counselor / camper privileged information and put into a sealed envelope. A suggestion is to return the letter / card to camper with a Christmas card and "How Ya Doin' on Your Challenges Note". If the counselor is not interested or available, a staff member could do it.

Fred Pahl Revised 9/03

How to Implement the YMCA Leather Program into Day Camps

Parent Interpretation

A common concern is proposing too much Christianity into a Day Care Program. In YMCA Camping Christian emphasis is more traditionally accepted; but as day care throughout the school year has flourished, our summer program can be less separated from our intent to provide year-round day care, particularly in cooperation with the schools. Therefore, parents' expectations regarding the spiritual growth of their child in our after-school day camp programs may have a different point of reference than "sending them to camp". The essential point is that each YMCA proposing to use the Leather Program needs to clarify its Christian position. Hopefully, this has already been done for many other important reasons. The mission statement of day care, camp, P.E. and every program of the YMCA are essential. In all brochures it clearly states our purpose, lets people know our position, and makes a Christian Emphasis Program option like the Leather program in the summertime a less unexpected entity. The parent should also be informed through a brochure or Day Camp Newsletter on these points:

- Give an explanation of the program.
- Enumerate benefits for their child.
- Enlist their participation and support at home for the program.
- Establish the YMCA's uniqueness from other childcare programs. The values which make the YMCA the best choice for quality day care for children are based on our practice of Christian Principles like loving one another, honesty, caring, giving, treating others as we wish to be treated, etc.
- Emphasize that it is an optional Summer Day Camp Program that the child will be given a choice to participate in if they desire. Campers will still be made to feel like a great "Y" kid even if they don't want to be part of this particular program.

How to Implement the YMCA Leather Program into Day Camps

Materials Needed

Study cards, ceremonies, leathers, counselor sheets for "signing-up" showing name, counselor's name, group, which leather, space to note when the ceremony is planned. (Address and phone number may be added for record keeping purposes).

Staff Orientation

- Counselor training is essential to familiarize the staff with the content of the study cards and how to do a ceremony.
- How to counsel information should be shared and role-played.
- Information on how to help the camper set specific goals is needed so that it is clear to the counselor what typical concerns and goals of 9, 10 and 11 year old children are.
- Listening skills, as well as how to ask questions in order to draw a person into a conversation should be covered.

Small Group Time

Small group time may be planned directly following the general assembly in the morning or at the close of the first day of camp. The later has worked best. About ½ hour is needed to provide for talking, sharing, and processing. Small group leadership training is essential and would also apply to skills needed to introduce and promote the Leather Program.

Coordination

A director or head counselor would take on the responsibility to distribute material, collect sign-up sheets, schedule ceremony times, prepare suitable ceremonies and locations and be a resource leader for one-on-one counseling ideas and support.

How to Implement the YMCA Leather Program into Day Camps

In order for more campers to have the opportunity to participate in the Leather Program, the schedule of activities should be looked at in terms of more and less active weeks. For example, the program would fit very well into overnight weeks, or on weeks where the biggest or most popular trips are not planned. This would "plus" weeks with less activity and provide a less highly scheduled block of time to do ceremonies. An overnight or park location may provide a place to make a point removed from the main group.

One Week Approach

One-on-one counseling could be introduced on Monday in small groups and then arranged throughout the week with the ceremony on Friday.

Two weeks or more approach

If you wanted to do the Leather Program weeks 4 & 8, using the small group time as preparation for that can be part of weeks 3 & 7. This would help encourage campers to come for additional weeks if they are not already enrolled. Returning campers who received their Leathers in a prior session could be pulled out of their regular small group times into a "ceremony team group". This special group can help plan the next ceremony. This will get them involved, give them a helper role, reinforce their Christian Values, and promote the program to newcomers. (Call them Leather Leaders and use this special group time to talk to them about spirit, mind, body, and social growth more in depth). If you do not wish to separate campers who have gotten their Leathers already in the summer, they could stay in their counselor's regular small groups. They will still be very much a part of talks and sharing. They will also know that they will have an active role in the next ceremony by attending in support of new friends getting their Leathers for the first time. It would be easy to add a question to the ceremonies like, "Do you, YMCA Leather Leaders, promise to support by friendship and caring, these new Leather Friends?" or "The campers that already have received their Leathers will now lead us all in the Lord's Prayer"... etc.

How to Implement the YMCA Leather Program into Day Camps

Policies and Practices

- Blindfolds should not be used at Leather Ceremonies in Day or Resident Camps. This will prove to be less frightening and distracting.
- Traditionally the Leathers start with the Triangles at age 9 and all first time Leather campers. Every camper beginning the Program starts with the Triangle, regardless of age. Ten year olds who have received a Square can receive a Circle.
- Day campers who are 12 years old may receive a Leather as part of the benefits of the Day Camp Program if becoming a Ragger is not available to them. Or a camper Blue Rag Ceremony late in summer could be performed for all 12 year olds and older who would like to participate. First, encourage the camper to attend a resident camp and participate in the Rag Program at that time. (This also acts as a promotion for Resident Camp). If this not possible, campers 12 years old and older become a Ragger either during the day camp session or at a special time late in summer. All colors may be done for Day Campers and staff.

How to Implement the YMCA Leather Program into Day Camps

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
General camp presentation should be made at a general assembly in the	Small group discussion about the program can be done if not done during day one.	Counsel campers during activities not requiring Leader's supervision;

morning or at the close of the day.
Small group discussion some time during the day.
Counseling times should be set at this time.

Counseling times should be set at this time.

rest period, free time, park and beach days.

Day 4

Same as day 3. Ceremonies can be scheduled by the Director or head counselor. These can be done as a small group activity. Ideal times are on less active days like beach or park days or during free time.

Day 5

Ceremonies can be continued if desired on this day.

Judy Hunter
May 1987

For further information about the YMCA Rag / Leather Program

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