

## What To Do On My Summer Vacation?

by Bill Moller

Spring is finally here, and the signs of the season are just beginning to show – the bird songs sound a little brighter, the sun’s rays have a renewed warmth, the trees and shrubs appear ready to burst with new growth and bloom, my taxes are filed and the refunds are in the bank. All this tells me it’s time to plan my summer vacation.

All things considered, this past year was a good one for me. I was able to serve and worship the Lord through participation at church and the support of various ministries. Over the past twelve months I spent time with family and friends, studied to advance my knowledge in a number of arenas of life, and, most importantly, I remembered to rest and be silent, allowing God to speak through that “still small voice” mentioned in scripture. But now, it’s time to travel – to discover new places, to speak to people I’ve never met before, to experience sights and sounds unlike those of my home and community, and to seek refreshment and renewal.

One of the foundational beliefs I hold dear and espouse through *ThinkingChristians.org* and *CogentNotion* is the idea of getting outside the four walls of the local church. Far too many people fail to venture beyond the comfort of their close-knit circle of friends and the usual activities they enjoy. I believe we need to open ourselves to new things, unfamiliar places, and different cultures. I’m not speaking about mission travel, though that is a great thing. I’m referring to the simple task of visiting a neighboring church or attending a conference sponsored by a ministry or denomination other than your own. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a “church-sponsored” event, either. Vacation can and should be a key means by which we expand our horizons and broaden our thinking. Remember, as noted in my last newsletter, “What you focus on determines what you miss.”

Through the year I watch for and attend seminars and

concerts to help inform my awareness of topics and trends. I’ve been known to drive nine hours to see a Steve Bell concert, and to fly 2000 miles to study how faith is being portrayed in Hollywood films. For more than a decade I’ve made a concerted effort to locate special vacation spots where I can be immersed in the beauty of God’s creation while enjoying friendly conversation with people from different locals and backgrounds.

It seems appropriate to share some of my findings with you.

Let me begin by introducing you to the first location on my list (which is in no special order).

**Sandy Cove**, in North East, MD (that’s actually the name of the town – “North East”), is a great family resort! It rests at the very top of the Chesapeake Bay and is beautifully situated to provide a panoramic view across the headwaters that feed the bay. The glorious sunsets that occur each evening are breathtaking, evidenced by the number of guests who suspend their activities to watch the rays spill over the trees on the distant shore and glisten across the expanse of constantly moving water. I’ve actually heard applause as the radiance of that huge orange ball dips below the horizon and the sky-blue-pink clouds begin to form and morph.



But Sandy Cove isn’t just about sitting and watching the majesty of nature. It is a Christian Conference Center which engages some of the best-known guest speakers you will hear anywhere. I have attended seminars by Woodrow Kroll and Crawford Loritts, as well as concerts by Carolyn Arends and Steve Green. Daily activities center around presentations, usually morning and evening, that include teaching, preaching, concerts, workshops, and interactive sessions. While the adults are involved in these presentations, the children are enjoying all sorts of learning activities and sports events run by trained youth leaders. I suggest you visit their website ([www.SandyCove.org](http://www.SandyCove.org)) to get a list of those activities since I wouldn’t have enough space to list them all.

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Lots of time is left free so families can gather (or not) to enjoy many leisure options available at Sandy Cove. Here are some examples: swimming in the two pools (indoor and outdoor); hiking on the nature trails; boating, para-sailing and wave-cutter rides on the bay; daring rides like the circus trapeze, the Big Swing, and the Zip-Line; tennis, shuffleboard and the fitness center; miniature golf, the snack bar, gift shop and thrift shop; and much, much more.

Sandy Cove is open nearly all year long, and special event weeks and weekends are scheduled almost continuously throughout the calendar year. During my visits, I chose to stay at the Chesapeake Lodge, their main facility, but campgrounds with log cabins and lots for RV's and tents are available as well. Since the conference center is only about an hour away from historic Philadelphia, spectacular Longwood Gardens, and the Inner Harbor at Baltimore, you can also manage a little sightseeing if you plan well.

I would be remiss (especially in these uncertain financial times) if I failed to mention that Sandy Cove offers special sponsorship programs for those serving in the military, those suffering financial hardships, and children who want to attend Camp Sandy Cove (their sister facility in West Virginia), but cannot afford it. If you fit one of those categories, I encourage you to contact Sandy Cove for information. Additionally, if you feel God leading you to help them in this effort, you can visit their website for information about donating funds to help defray the costs for others.

Next, let me take you from the shores of the Atlantic to the peaks of the Rockies – Pikes Peak to be precise. **Glen Eyrie Castle** ([www.gleneyrie.org](http://www.gleneyrie.org)) in Colorado Springs, CO, originally the estate of railroad tycoon and Civil War General William Jackson Palmer, was purchased by the Navigators in 1953 ([www.navigators.org](http://www.navigators.org)) and has operated as a Christian Conference Center since 2003. My visit to Glen Eyrie just two years ago was one of the most awe-inspiring events of my life. The conference with Craig Detweiler, Hollywood filmmaker and Fuller Theological Seminar Professor, was excellent and the setting for the event on Glen Eyrie property was breathtaking. A location adjacent to the Garden of the Gods Nature



Center and just a few minutes from 15,000 foot Pikes Peak, places Glen Eyrie in a mountainous cleft that surrounds its guests with vistas that dwarf anything I've ever seen before. As I drove through the gated entrance and up the drive to the castle, I could not help but imagine King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Yes, Glen Eyrie really is a castle. At breakfast one morning I shared a table with an author who was researching the castles of Colorado. She confirmed that it met all the criteria of a castle. While walking the grounds of the Glen Eyrie estate you experience a very peaceful and calm atmosphere. Colorado Springs is rather arid, but Glen Eyrie Castle and its companion buildings and hiking paths are nestled away among stately trees, brilliant red-rock outcroppings, and babbling brooks.

Just as an aside, one thing I've noticed among the resorts I mention in this article is the exceptional food service at each location. At Glen Eyrie, the meals, often served on a private patio off the main dining hall, are fabulous culinary delights. Grilled salmon, roast pork tenderloins, fresh vegetables, and deserts that make your eyes pop out of your head (or, more accurately, your stomach over your belt), are just a few examples.

There is something divinely spiritual in the experience of waking early and hiking up a winding trail to a precipice that looks out on the foothills of the Rockies. Vivid and lasting memories are created when one takes a few moments to sit and listen to the wind and absorb the glimmer of the early morning sun, before hiking back down the steep incline past wild flowers and spectacular rock formations. Some may experience a bit of trepidation when they read the warnings about the wild varmints that inhabit the region: mountain lions, big horn sheep, snakes and other rather menacing creatures, but reasonable caution while walking the grounds or hiking the paths should bring you home alive and unscathed.

As I mentioned, Glen Eyrie has a calm presence about it. The guest speakers seem to mirror this in their presentations as well. The atmosphere is casual and the people are warm and friendly. Perhaps this has something to do with the thin air you're breathing at 6000 feet above sea level. Whatever the cause, be prepared to relax and enjoy the mood and the visual

appeal while hearing excellent lectures in the Great Hall or gathering in small groups for discussion and activities.

Glen Eyrie is definitely what I would call a “retreat center”, in the sense that you are cloistered away in a picturesque setting attending specially focused meetings conducted by speakers who help make it a “holy” getaway, of sorts.

There is no hustle and bustle at this estate, but nearby in Colorado Springs, you can visit the headquarters of many prominent Christian ministries. The Navigators (of course), Focus on the Family, Compassion International, Young Life, and the International Bible Society, just to name a few. For more touristy treats you can visit the Air Force Academy, the Olympic Training Village, the Cheyenne Zoo, Pikes Peak and lots more, but be sure to visit Manitou Springs – an arts and crafts jewel with a frontier village feel.

Now, let’s return to the East Coast and head south to Asheville, NC, the home of **The Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove** ([www.thecove.org](http://www.thecove.org)). The warm and friendly feeling you get when you drive up the winding mountain road, pull up to the magnificent training center building, and are greeted by the host of caring volunteers is truly inspiring. The facilities are spectacular and the quality of service, food and spiritual nurture are a tribute to southern hospitality and good Christian neighborliness. If there is one thing to which I can attest regarding the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, it is that they know how to do things well. No half-hearted efforts are evident at The Cove. Everything is top notch and properly presented.

I have visited The Cove a number of times, and have had the pleasure to hear some great speakers and musicians including Warren Wiersbe, Steve Brown, Gail MacDonald, Dick Purnell, and Cheri Keagy. The 500 seat lecture hall is a state-of-the-art theater environment where you can comfortably see and hear the presenters. The guest rooms are spacious and well appointed. The print material (which is always in abundance with the BGEA) is helpful for following along, taking notes and personal study. The availability of a Chaplain-in-Residence and other trained Bible teachers and counselors makes your stay at The Cove a genuine pleasure.



The facilities and seminars at The Cove are designed for adults and focus on comfort and relaxation (BGEA offers a separate Youth Camp during the summer on an adjacent property for children). The conferences are held most of the year and are generally three or four days in length. Between lectures, workshops, devotional and prayer times, you can enjoy the rocking chair marathons on the grand deck, or walk nicely groomed (though hilly) paths punctuated with benches and scriptural hitching posts for you to contemplate along your

journey. You may choose to hike a few miles up the mountain to the overlook point from which you can see the Smokey Mountains in the distance. Or perhaps you will stop by the Visitor Center at the Chatlos Memorial Chapel to enjoy the mini-museum and a multimedia presentation, or just curl up with a book in the big comfy chairs and couches scattered throughout the facility.

In Asheville and the surrounding communities you can enjoy tourist attractions such as the Biltmore Estate, the River Arts District, the Flatrock Playhouse, the Folk Art Center, the Botanical Gardens, or simply enjoy a scenic drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway. A worthwhile day trip to Charlotte to visit the Billy Graham Library is an option as well.

I haven’t told you where I’m going this year, have I? Well allow me to share my enthusiasm for what I have planned for this summer’s vacation.

I am booked at **Laity Lodge** ([www.laitylodge.org](http://www.laitylodge.org)), a Texas retreat center that “presides over an extraordinary confluence of creativity and faith-building”, as the website states. Located about two hours west of San Antonio, this unique facility is owed by the H. E. Butt Foundation (named after Howard Butt, grocery chain owner and philanthropist - [www.hebuttdn.org](http://www.hebuttdn.org)) and rests in a Hill Country canyon on the shores of the Frio River. You actually have to drive through the river to get to Laity Lodge – no roads lead to the property.

I will be enjoying the preaching and teaching of Scotty Smith, Pastor of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee, and co-author (with Michael Card) of the book *Unveiled Hope*, along with other speakers and musical guests. One other interesting perk is that San Antonio has a thriving arts community, and Laity Lodge

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has artists who are available during free times to work with you on special projects. During my visit Jody Gilles, who makes wooden walking sticks, will be in residence.



Having not yet stayed at Laity Lodge, I can only note the promises on their website which state that the facilities are handcrafted by local artisans, the food is gourmet, and the rooms are meticulously maintained. I think this description played a major part in my decision to visit Laity Lodge:

“While each retreat is unique, all provide a small universe of choices for guests. Do you crave mind-expanding study of scripture that can inform and empower all aspects of your life? Do you need to experience some healing for pain and brokenness? Solitude and silence? Creative outlets? Do you need a time to simply be loved and served by a caring staff and other guests? Deep unwinding and rest? All sorts of recreation? Hilarity and just some plain ole' fun? They are all here—every day.”

In nearby San Antonio one can enjoy the scenic River Walk, remember the famous Mission San Antonio de Valero (*The Alamo*), or tour the San Fernando Cathedral where Jim Bowie married Ursula de Veramendi.

If you don't see significant travel in your summer plans this year, consider a weekend in Ocean City, NJ, and while you're there visit the **Ocean City Tabernacle** ([www.octabernacle.org](http://www.octabernacle.org)) where nationally known speakers and musicians appear each week. Or, a short stay at

**America's Keswick** in Whiting, NJ (<http://americaskeswick.org>), or **Spruce Lake Christian Retreat Center** (<http://sprucelake.org>) in Canadensis, PA, might be a better fit for your schedule and budget.

There are two special getaways I hope to include in coming years. The first is a tour of the Holy Land with Dr. David Reid ([www.growingchristians.org](http://www.growingchristians.org)) who has led tours for many years and provides biblical background and commentary at each destination. The second is a hermit-like retreat to a center called “**Pacem in Terris**” (*Peace on Earth*) near Minneapolis, MN. (<http://paceminterris.org>). This hermitage is probably a bit too rustic for many – no electricity, no running water, only one prepared communal meal a day – but is extremely intriguing to me, and possibly to you.

As a final note, let me point out that if you have already planned your vacation - be it Vegas, or Orlando, or Myrtle Beach or some other prime location – please take a look at the Events Calendar on my website ([www.ThinkingChristians.org](http://www.ThinkingChristians.org)) to see if there is a speaker or musician you like appearing nearby. Taking the time to attend a lecture or a concert could add a great deal to your travel plans, and provide you with something more long-lasting than a sunburn to display upon your return.

God willing! (James 4:13-15)