

## TRAIL OF LIGHTS – A PROJECT FOR CAMPGROUNDS, SEMINARS OR WEEKENDS WITH OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

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### 1 Brief Overview

#### 1.1 Target Group

Teens	Ages 12-17
Youth and young adults age 16 and above	Ages 16 and above

#### 1.2 General Conditions

Duration	Depending on group size, 2 – 3 hours (including evaluation)
Group Size	10 – 30 persons
Recommended number of workers	A minimum of 2, for larger groups, 3-4
Location	Outside in a forest familiar to the leadership (at least the trail), not the entire trail through the forest, if possible the shorter portion of the trail through the forest.
Additional notes	For youth it should be completely dark (no full moon!). If candles are used, it shouldn't be rainy or unstable weather. Also take heed of the fire danger level. In such cases, LED lights should be used. By rain, glow sticks can be substituted for candles.

#### 1.3 Notes on Content

Assignment to the chapters of Social principles	<b>Chapter 1:</b> "The natural world": God's creation, astonishment at the creation
Target thought	A trail of lights fills all senses with the beauty of the night. The participants experience a mysterious nature which also includes the dangers and threats through the imaginable environment and the darkness.
Method	Individual or partner experience in the forest at night; followed by reflection in the group
Preparation time	30 min to 2 h
Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrival of groups at starting point</li> <li>• One or two persons go ahead (it has to be dark already) and put up the lights</li> <li>• The group waits for 15 to 20 minutes until the first person starts; every two to three minutes somebody else starts</li> <li>• The finishing point is marked by two lights where the first person(s) wait, maybe hide, quietly and always take the arriving persons with them into their hiding place until everybody arrives.</li> <li>• Evaluation at the finish point</li> <li>• At the end an evening/night song</li> <li>• On the way back: collect the candles, look for missing ones the next day</li> </ul>

- Possibly walk the trail again in the day time and talk about differences between night and day
- Material needed
- about 30 jars with 30 candles (white candles work best)
  - a box to carry all the jars and candles
  - matches or lighter
- ! LED lights can be substituted for Candles. Depending on their brightness, quite a few more will be needed.
- Preparation
- Be sure to walk the trail during the day and get to know it!
  - There are more demanding trails of lights, some of which cross right through the forest, and carry a certain accident risk.
  - I always lead trails of lights with young adults on forest trails, which greatly reduces the risk of falls and injuries. This terrain is particularly suited to nights with a new moon or cloudy sky.
  - I wouldn't do any trail of lights if it's raining or threatening to rain. The danger of the candles being quenched is just too great.
  - Depending on how convoluted the forest trails are, the total route may be longer or shorter, since the next light needs to be visible at all times.
  - For a long, straight trail, the route can run three or four kilometers with 30 lights.
  - The lights can only be placed just before the start of the trek. This is necessary so that the person who places them can look back and make sure the previous light is still visible! If it disappears behind a curve or in a dip (or isn't visible for whatever reason), it's necessary to backtrack until the light is visible again. This ensures that those who follow the trail can always see the next light!
  - A light should always be placed at any forks of the trail so that the new direction is clearly visible.
  - The end of the trail is clearly marked by a double light (or possibly by a string of lights from the Christmas decorations). This also where the person who marked the trail is hiding and waiting for the first person to arrive.

## 2 Deepening of the content for co-workers/Introduction to the topic

### 2.1 *What meaning does the topic have for humans and the environment in which they live?*

During the adventure of a Trail of lights, nature, especially the forest, is experienced in a totally different way. This experience picks up on an archaic human experience, since in our "lightened" world we rarely experience the darkness of the night and the woods. In adventure-based learning this aspect is called "distance from everyday life", through which well-worn patterns of behavior become less important and other or rather new skills are discovered. Moreover, a trail of lights is a challenge and a subjective risk for almost everybody. Coping with the challenge and the bonding experience in the evaluation promotes self-esteem, and sets in motion a maturing process which also can be applied to other experiences of risk in daily life.

### 2.2 *What kind of biblical references are there?*

Exodus 20,21: The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

1. Kings 8,12: Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud;" (an unusual thought since God is usually rather associated with light). In the last verse of the advent song "The Night Will Soon Be Ending" by Jochen Klepper it says: "God deigns to live in the dark with us, yet he made it bright." – this is what's expressed by the ambiguous statement.

In Isaiah 60,2 the darkness is attributed to earth and peoples: "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you."

In Psalms 23 “Even though I walk through the darkest valley,” is described without fear of a disaster. And in fact, our journey through life is often coined by dark distances and the question is if we’re afraid to be able to get our bearings about a small light or if we don’t know whether we are on the right track (cf. in the situation of professional orientation or sickness the is a wish of hope that there will be light again that we reach our goal).

### 2.3 Application to the realities in the lives of the target group

Night reduces the experience of the woods to sounds, wraps up and creates tension and makes us curious of what’s hiding in the dark. Perhaps it is beneficial to repeat the trail the next day to see everything perceived at night with new eyes.

The silence of the woods, the trail through the darkness, the small lights being barely in sight, the few sounds of the night in the woods – all this develops into an experience as a human on the journey through life. There are stretches where orientation can only be found through dim lights in the night.

The following topics can also be approached: personal fears in view of being alone and in the dark, unusual sounds of nature that haven’t been noticed until now, the ability to trust, steps into the uncertain, being alone but still not alone, being helped up by a group, trust in God.

Adolescents and young adults that grew up only in the city will experience nature at night in a different way. Maybe fears play a bigger role for them than for adolescents who grew up on the country, and have already had a lot of expeditions through the woods at night. Also, those participants more often ask for flashlights or cellphone lights, and want to use them more often. **Please note that the use of other lights destroys the experience and meaning of a trail of lights.** Someone who wants to use a light out of fear should wait instead for the next person to come, and then go through the adventure together.

### 2.4 Course – detailed plan

While putting up the lights, the group stays together and discusses, for example, whether it’s important for somebody to not have to go alone. Maybe those who are reluctant can be convinced to at least try going alone at first. It’s also possible to wait for the next person along the way. But if it’s clear that someone doesn’t have the courage to go alone at all, he or she can also start with someone else. Any disparaging remarks toward anyone with fears need to be called out and rejected. A trail of lights isn’t about who is the bravest, or who stands above the others. The goal is to talk about possible fears, and to not allow a group atmosphere to form where others are made fun of or put down. Quite the contrary; there needs to be an atmosphere in which the participants feel carried by the group, in which their fears are taken seriously and where they feel that the group is their safety net. I’ve also experienced trails of lights in which the participants of the group waiting for the starting signal vie with one another for horror stories. But a trail of lights isn’t a test of courage, where one has to expect frightening moments along the trail. I would put horror stories in this category. I don’t find this sort of thing pedagogically useful, and don’t support them.

The interval should be between one and two minutes. It’s important to advise the participants to go slowly to ponder the topics mentioned, and to maybe enjoy the trail and to experience fears intentionally.

It can be signaled in various ways that the participants have reached the end of the trail (quiet music, the two candles mentioned above, a string of lights, etc.). A period of uncertainty is also possible. The newly arrived person can be requested to call out, or to wait silently or ... It’s important for the group that’s already at the end of the trail to be quiet. Only when the person that was designated to be last (from the leadership team) arrives, the group can sing a song (“The moon has risen” or similar). Afterwards, there is round of evaluation. The following questions can be asked:

What was the biggest challenge for you of this trail of lights?

Did curiosity and the tension of a new experience dominate fear? What images came to mind?

Can you feel secure alone in the woods at night?

Could you relate the trail of lights to aspects of your faith?

Did you feel new aspects of the secrets of Creation in the dark? (e.g., change between day and night, forest, nature in the dark, animal voices, sounds, smells etc.)?

For me, it’s also important to value the open exchange.

On the way back together, the candles need to be collected. It’s important to know exactly how many there are. If any of them are missing, they should be looked for the next day. This is also an opportunity to show the group the trail by day.

I wish you a good time in the darkness of existence

Gebhard Böhringer

#### Fundamentals

Pictures:

Right with Gebhard Böhringer

Literature:

Anke Schleufer and Steffi Kreuzinnger: „Naturerlebnis Ferien – Handbuch für die Gestaltung ökopädagogischer Kinder- und Jugendfreizeiten“, Praktische Erlebnispädagogik, Fachverlag Dr. Sandmann, 83S.  
You can also find various different examples of a trail of light in the internet under the keyword “Lichterreise”.

Translation: Madeleine Strassburg