

Camping and Retreat Ministries

Director's 2018 Report

Karen Dillon

For the first time last January, the Camping and Retreat Ministries hosted Safari Winter Blast for special needs students. With the help of Kylie Shetler, the plans and preparations were made. A total of eight campers registered to participate in the winter fun. Luckily, there was snow that weekend. The evening began with time at the Vandalia Recreation Center, swimming and playing in the warm water. After returning to the cabins, we played games, enjoyed a snack, and had devotions. The campers and counselors were all ready for bed.

One girl had never been away from her mother in all her eleven years. This event was traumatic for the mother. It was a good thing that there were cell phones and text messages. To help the mother with the separation anxiety, many pictures and notes were sent showing the fun the girl was having, thus reassuring that her daughter was doing well.

Saturday continued the excitement and new experiences. Several of the campers had never played in the snow even though they have lived in Ohio their entire lives. There was some apprehension as one very timid, easily frightened camper made her first ride down the small slope on a sled. We all held our breaths, not knowing what her reaction might be. As she happily screamed all the way down the hill, we all sighed in relief. The next time she went down, she raised her arms in glee as if she were on a roller coaster. We didn't count the number of times she made the trip up and down the hill.

Another camper was fascinated with building a 9 foot snow person. She didn't exactly know what she was making, but seemed to fall in love with the snow person after it was finished. Many times this nonverbal girl would smile, walk around the figure, pat its tummy or shoulder or give it a big hug.

The following weekend was a rainy, muddy, snowless Winter Blast for those who came from all over the District. However, the fun was not diminished in any way. The hike with Tom Hissong taught the campers ways to identify trees and bushes in the winter. Who knew there was a plant with square twigs? Cheap red cups and masking tape were all the rage in games and competitions. Good food, singing, worship, stories, time to play, making new friends and enjoying old friends all combine to create a special set apart experience in a safe, nature filled atmosphere of God's kingdom on earth. The simple living together with everyone was wonderful to witness.

Summer Camp 2018

All the summer camps were well attended. 117 campers, an increase of about 22% in our camper population, engaged in the learning, service, and excitement of camp. The camps offered in 2018 were:

Adult/Child Camp This was a camp for grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents to bring smaller children from kindergarten through second grade. Living and working together at camp enriched the relationship of those coming through their shared experiences and activities created especially for them.

Intergenerational Service Camp Volunteering to serve others in the community gave these campers a close-up view of the needs close to home and how they could be of help. This camp provided high school students with community service credits they needed to graduate. Everyone benefited from their generous involvement,

Safari Camp Here was a camp designed just for special needs campers, an underserved group sometimes excluded from the activities of a general population. Safari Camp allowed these campers to grow and develop their unique talents and skills in a very safe, loving environment.

Family Camp Who could resist the happy time families experience at this camp? Children of all ages played and organized themselves as they scampered in and around the camp. Worship and praise filled the hearts of everyone through campfires, scripture lessons, singing, praying, and learning together what God was calling all to do. Families blend so much that it was only when they left that the children got sorted out.

Creative Arts Camp They wanted to be known as the Family. Campers were quite diverse in age, size, grade level, but that was no obstacle for them. Sometime the campers were mixed together, sometimes separated for age appropriate activities. All were accepted as they were. Campers were inspired to grow in their knowledge, faith, and wisdom through the Bible studies, engaging workshops, opportunities of service, worship, and fun. One highlight was the trip to the Brethren Retirement Community to volunteer to do a variety of services while there.

Pieceful Quilting Camp Being pampered as a quilter is very satisfying. This camp mixes work, service projects, and sharpening quilting skills all into one lovely experience while all the cooking and cleaning is left to someone else. An expert quilting instructor guides each camper on techniques, new ideas, solving problems, and trying different approaches. Time for Bible study, reflection, and sharing adds a deeper dimension to the camp.

The Camping and Retreat Ministries is serving a growing number of people. New directions and exciting events are being planned to increase our circle of participation. All God's children are welcome at the banquets set through camps and retreats.

The following blog was written by Laura Hay, the Youth Peace Team Representative who attended our Creative Arts Camp.

Youth Peace Travel Team

A Cup Full in Southern Ohio
Posted on June 27, 2018 by admin

"Fill up my cup, fill up my cup let it overflow. Fill up my cup, fill up my cup let it overflow. Fill up my cup, fill up my cup let it overflow! Let it overflow with love!"

My cup is full as I enter in to the rest of my summer, starting with the beautiful souls at the Southern Ohio Creative Arts Camp. Over this week, these campers blew me away with their love for one another, their willingness to have conversations about tough subjects, and to open their hearts to many brand-new faces, including my own.

The folks here were open to me bringing new ideas that might have seemed a little out of the box at first, such as clowning and improvisation. But after a little time, I think they started to celebrate their own passions, realizing that they can be mouthpieces for the campers' causes as my passions have become for me.

My first session was with a group of 12 campers ranging from 6-18 years old. They all had so much to add to our conversation about peace and were so willing to jump into the little bit of clowning we did. Bible Study gave us many openings to enter discussion about what it meant to speak up. We talked about the causes we felt most passionate about and how we could be advocates for the things we feel are important. For one of the girls I talked to, that issue was women's rights, and I got to have a lovely discussion with this young activist about what that meant to her.

During one of the sessions, I asked the campers to explore different words or phrases they associated with "peace." I got some great answers! Words such as: reassurance, love, Jesus, singing, the ocean, nature, standing up for what you believe in, and color! These words were the threads that built the tapestry of meaning that our group had for the word "peace."

On Thursday night, I saw a true show of peace during a foot washing service. Before feet washing, Pastor Carl asked the campers and the counselors that if anything was laying on their hearts to let it be lifted by going to the person and giving them a hug. Adults, take notes! These children, who during camp became practically like a family even to the point of bickering, put away the jokes and the arguments and embraced each other. They asked for forgiveness, and pardoned their brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a truly beautiful thing! As we washed feet, we sang "Will you let me be your servant?" During the last verse, as everyone finished, we joined together in unison to sing the last chorus. The peace of Christ was truly tangible in that room!

It was a joy to be in community with the joyful Christians at Creative Arts Camp in Southern Ohio! I am excited to see what is yet to come this summer! Peace will be Prevail. On to camp Stover!

Until next time,
Laura, Youth Peace Advocate

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