



MARCH CIRCUIT

VOLUME 2/NUMBER 3

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church



Oh, the Lord is good to me,
and so I thank the Lord...



The 7 Foundations

PROVIDE SACRED SPACES APART

All of us in United Methodist Camp and Retreat ministries encourage guests and participants to receive through letting go, to move closer by being still, to hear the Divine Word in silence, to advance through retreat, to act on God's behalf by resting, to learn community from solitude and strangers, and to discover ways to be more present at home by taking time away.

NURTURE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP

One unique gift of Christian camps and retreat centers that other types of programs and centers rarely highlight are specific opportunities to learn from and practice the Christian path taught by Jesus. Camp and retreat ministry has an enduring reputation for frequently inspiring people to new levels of Christian discipleship.

TEACH CREATION CARE AND APPRECIATION

The waters nourishing modern camp and retreat ministry run deep within United Methodist heritage. With colleagues, John Wesley boldly chose to move preaching and faith formation into the "open air" where the people would have new access and new opportunities to hear and respond to the Good News.

PARTNER WITH UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES & AGENCIES

One of the most fruitful and vital dimensions of United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries is our participation in a tremendous covenant connection. United Methodists deliberately choose to link together and join forces in a common mission together.

EXTEND CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY

Welcoming people and doing all we can to engender a true experience of community touches people profoundly. We live in a time when people long for connections, but often hesitate to reach out to form new relationships. Moving from discomfort and at times general suspicion of strangers to friendship is a precious blessing prioritized within Christian camp or retreat settings.

DEVELOP PRINCIPLED SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Leaders play a critical part in shaping the present and the future for good or for ill. The number of books and resources about the nature of leadership and how to lead are innumerable. Within the plethora of perspectives and possibilities, our United Methodist camp and retreat ministries help people grow in a very specific type of leadership.

INSPIRE AND EQUIP LIVES FOR LOVE AND JUSTICE

Camp and Retreat experiences provide fruitful opportunities for people to gather and to live together for a time. These times of gathering at our centers dedicated to growth in love has great potential to inspire all guests to embrace more life-giving practices and to act more justly and lovingly.

To read more about each of these seven foundations, visit:

umcrm.camp/about-us/7-foundations/



The Spring Heights Experience

By David Johnston, former camper, current summer staff and Pastor of Concord UMC in Athens, W.Va.

“Do not be afraid” is one of the most common phrases found in the Bible. We hear it on the lips of angels and prophets when people are overwhelmed by the presence of the holy or the challenges they are facing. As a kid, I found myself afraid a lot of the time that I wasn’t good enough, particularly not good enough for God. I have no idea where I got that idea. Both my parents were committed Sunday school teachers and would never teach such a thing. As a 4th grade camper at Spring Heights, I also learned some new things to be afraid of thanks to my cabin counselors: ghosts, the ghosts of Hicks’ Cabin, and the Braxton County monster. Yet more importantly, Spring Heights is where I first came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and heard God say, “Do not be afraid.”

I remember Don Keller, the camp director, reading the story “The Rag Man” by Walter Wangerin, Jr. The ragman goes about town taking on people’s old clothes for new, and in doing so, takes their pain, suffering, and sins upon himself. It was through this story that the gospel finally made sense to me. God accepts me not because I earn it, but because Jesus takes my sin and brokenness on himself and makes a way for us to God. I no longer had to be afraid of God, for God has revealed God’s love for humanity through Jesus Christ. I also figured that if God can overcome sin and death, then I probably need not worry about the Braxton County monster either.

I spent a total of four summers as a camper at Spring Heights, and then returned in my 20’s as a cabin counselor for two summers. I still remember how afraid I was to be responsible for four or five boys for a whole week. But God showed up in the most amazing ways through the words and actions of the kids, and again said, “Do not be afraid.” Words fail to capture how amazing it is to be in ministry together with kids and other counselors day in and day out in the beauty of God’s creation.

That time as a cabin counselor was special to me and my faith journey for two reasons. First, I met Rachael, who is now my wife, while we were both on staff there. Second, God used that time of daily worship, Bible study, and life together to help me discern God’s calling to ministry on my life. We are all called to ministry, and I was particularly called to serve God through ordination as an elder in the United Methodist Church.

It is my hope and prayer that God continues to work through Spring Heights and other camping ministries. In a world of such uncertainty and where kids and youth wonder if they have a place or value, Christian camps provide a place for them to hear the good news that I heard: “Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10).



Spring Heights is Calling, and I Must Go

By Megan DiLorenzo, former camper and current summer staff

I have typed and retyped this trying to put together the perfect words to describe my love, appreciation, and passion for Spring Heights. There isn't a day that goes by that the words "Spring Heights" do not come out of my mouth, so you wouldn't expect this to be hard for me. However, it is hard to put together the perfect words when there are so many things I could say. I realize there is a feeling I get when I'm at camp. When I'm standing in the field with the sun hitting me and staring out at the cross, I only need one word to describe it: home.



Megan DiLorenzo (back right), with the Girl Power campers

For the full story visit wvumc.org/news/camp

What Spring Heights Means to Me

By Steven May, former camper and current summer staff

Camp changes you. When I'm not at camp, I can be bad at socializing and I am very quiet and introverted. But when I'm at camp, I feel like I am a whole different person. Camp gives me a sense of belonging. Camp brings out the best in me. I've learned so much in my many years at camp. I've learned new things about myself, my



faith, and what I want to do with my life. I love getting to know all the kids, and helping them learn more about who they are, their faith, and who they want to be.

Helping kids overcome obstacles they're facing in their life is important to me. I feel I am able to do that at camp, especially at the challenge course when I can relate challenges on the course to challenges in campers' lives. I hope that I am able to make a difference in at least one kid's life, just like my counselors did for me when I was as a camper. *For the full story visit wvumc.org/news/camp*

Camp CJ and Future Success

By Nick Bias, former camper and current volunteer

I started attending church camp when I was five years old with my mom and dad who were both volunteer counselors. I attend many more years as a camper before becoming a junior counselor when I was 16, and eventually a counselor when I was in college. Camp Celebrate Jesus (Camp CJ) has been a major influence in my life and still is to this day. I use many of the lessons I learned while at camp in my daily life and walk with God. I try to live each day treating people with compassion and dignity. My dad taught me a Bible verse that reminds me of the importance of words. "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." –Proverbs 16:24 NIV

I could probably write a book of memories from camp but a few highlights are leading songs at campfire, talent shows, running each morning before breakfast, and communion on Thursday night. I loved singing songs with the whole camp by the fire and shouting as loud as we could. The talent shows were always a hit because we would practice a song/skit during the year to make sure it was perfect. As an avid college runner, I would always awake before sunlight to get my morning run in. I would use this hour or so each morning as personal devotional time with God. It was the right way to start each day. Communion on Thursday night was the most spiritually rewarding part of camp for me. It was a culmination of the week, a beautiful service where we celebrated in the Lord's supper and prayed together.



"Cabin 4 Boys" performing in a talent show competition



Nick Bias, center

I credit a lot of my success today to attending church camp for 15+ years. I will always keep a special place in my heart for my camp CJ family. The bonds we created can never be broken and are something I will cherish for the rest of my life. I am the Head Men's Cross Country/Track & Field Coach at the University of Charleston and I always try to implement the lessons I learned from camp with the guys I coach each day.

Celebrating Jesus at Camp

By Adam Justice, former camper and current volunteer

I first attended Camp Celebrate Jesus, or “Camp CJ,” when I was 11 years old. Back then it was called the Beckley District Youth Camp and held at the Raleigh County 4-H Camp. Since then, it has moved several times and expanded to include children and youth from three districts: Midland South, Greenbrier, and Southern. From my start as an 11-year-old camper, I moved up to be a Junior Counselor, a Counselor, and have even served as the camp preacher a time or two.

I was raised in church my whole life so I’ve always had a connection to God and the church. I was always involved in youth choirs and youth groups and things of that nature, but Camp CJ gave me a connection to God like none other. It is hard to put in to words how the camp has influenced my life, but I have nothing but good memories of my experiences at Camp CJ. Of course, these memories include the funny and silly things I did that any kid or youth experiences at camp. But what sticks with me the most are the ways I got to experience God with my friends. Memories of our vespers, campfires, and worship and communion services are still vivid to me and were a vital part of my spiritual development.



It is amazing the bonds that are created by spending a single week a year with people who start out as total strangers but end up being lifelong friends. I have a whole network of people that I would not be connected to if not for my time at Camp CJ, and are still in contact on a regular basis through social media. And I know these are people I could call on at any time for any reason and they would do what they could to help.

One example of the bond we share is this:

One of our fellow campers was involved in an accident a few years ago and had to have an extended stay in the hospital. Word began to spread of our friend’s accident through social media and those of us from camp began a large group message of what we could do to help the family. Someone agreed to accept donations we could give and transfer them to her PayPal account. After all the money was collected she bought some gas and food gift cards and delivered them to the family while they were at the hospital. It wasn’t anything major, but many of us who hadn’t seen or spoken to each other in years came together to help one of our “camp family” members in a time of need.

To me and many others, Camp CJ was and is more than just a “week at camp.” It is an experience that helps to spiritually mold and shape people for God’s Mission Field. I can think of at least four people who were a part of Camp CJ who have been called to ministry and are currently serving United Methodist Churches.

I am very thankful for my time at camp and I’m glad to know the camp is still active in helping to mold young people for God’s Kingdom work!

Crossroads Camp

By Beth Hall, former camper and current volunteer

Crossroads means so much to me. Why you may ask? Well, because in my opinion there is no other place to spend your summer! You draw close to God at Crossroads. It's the place where you not only become friends, but family. At camp, I've seen things happen that I never thought were possible.

I started going to Crossroads when I was in the third grade. In the third grade, I was worried about making friends and what other people would think of me, but at Crossroads it was different. I saw the counselors going crazy the first night in worship and thought to myself, "I want to be one of them someday." Crossroads showed me how I could experience a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The counselors modeled for me how amazing it is to be a part of the family of God. I became a part of that family that year.

As I went through junior high and high school I started going off course, but my Crossroads family remained a constant in my life. Without Crossroads Camp I believe my relationship with Jesus Christ would no longer exist. I began to look forward to camp each summer and I still do. It's a life-changing experience. You become close with true friends that you know will be there through everything.

I have many wonderful memories of Crossroads. I remember crazy worship dancing with Levi and Zach Brady. I remember the extreme heat and still wanting to play all those stupid yet entertaining games. I remember pillow talks and crocheting with my closest friends.

Covenant groups (C-groups) are something I will forever cherish in my heart. I know the people I opened up to in those groups will keep my secrets and help me when I need it. One memory I will never forget is the night Michael Pursley came and shared his testimony. Another time, people acted out the crucifixion. Watching it happen before my eyes was so moving that it makes me tear up just writing about it. Crossroads has so many memories and you can really feel the Holy Spirit moving throughout this camp!

Crossroads isn't just another summer camp. It's a home away from home. Many kids count down the days until it arrives each summer. At Crossroads, you will experience things you will never forget for the rest of your life. I love my Crossroads family and I someday hope to be able to give other kids the same experiences I had at camp.

"I began my church camping experience in 1978; it was the best thing my parents and church could have done for me. Experiencing God in a natural setting spoke to my heart at a very young age. Praying in an outdoor setting gives me a feeling and connection to God that no church setting has ever done. My goal in the outdoor ministry is to share how I was touched and see young and old feel it too."

-Lisa Withee, Crossroads United Methodist Church Camp



By Greg Cochran, former camper and current volunteer

I was in seventh or eighth grade the first time I went to Crossroads Camp. My pastor recommended Crossroads and I will admit, I was a bit skeptical. I had never been to church camp before and I figured I would be bored to death. I imagined a five-day-long Sunday School class, where campers had their heads stuck in the Bible most of the day. I quickly forgot about that idea after I met one of the counselors at camp. I found out that while I *would* be learning about God, I was not *only* going to be reading the Bible. Outside of those moments of study, my days as a camper would be filled with fun and friendship.

I was one of those kids who was dragged to church. I believed there was a God, but I never really committed to God. It was only after coming to camp for a couple of years that I got serious about my faith. My third year at camp transformed my relationship with God. I really connected with God and chose to commit to Christ at that point. Is the road easy? NO. Have I fallen? YES, but I get back up and keep moving on. Crossroads has transformed me into the person I am today, and I would not trade it for anything else.

MonValley Camp

*These stories are by former campers, now volunteers,
that lift up their experiences and memories of the MonValley Camp.*

The last week of July has been blocked out in my schedule for 14 years to attend Mon Valley District Church Camp. I have seen the camp from the eyes of camper, counselor, and teacher, and I am still just as excited to attend my 15th year in 2017. Our camp has always been the most open and welcoming group, year after year I witness God's love through Christians joining together to learn and grow. I truly believe our camp has transformed many lives in and outside of the church and I'm so proud to be part of this camp. We hope you'll join us this year!- *Ali Rivera*

Church camp to me is amazing and the best part of summer. It's where I have made lifelong friends with other Christians. It's where I have felt God use me to minister to other campers. It's where I have been accepted just as I am; no expectations attached. It's where I go to refill my cup. It's where I feel the closest to God. It's one of the things that brings me the most joy. It's what I look forward to when life starts to get me down. It's where I haven't just made friends, but have welcomed new people into my family.- *Casey Richards*

Do you ever try to imagine what your life would be like without something you enjoy? Every now and again I'll run that scenario through my head and change what would be missing. One thing I absolutely can't imagine my life without though, is the Mon-Valley District Church Camp. It's the last full week of July, and is the only reason I wish the end of summer would hurry up and get here every year. It has helped mold me into the person I am today. It's helped teach me so many valuable lessons a young Christian should know. It's taught me to be thankful: for friends who - no matter the time, are always there for you. It's taught me to listen: take a few minutes out of my busy day and just sit and listen to what God wants say to me. It's taught me to show my weakness along with my strength: as someone who doesn't like to show any emotion but happy, it's one of the few places I can let all m guards down. It's taught me to be a leader: I started out as a camper and am now the Junior Camp Director. It's taught me that self-sacrifice is worth it: after countless hours of preparation and lack of sleep, seeing a young person come to know Jesus because of some of the things I helped to do, some of the seeds He has let me plant, it's all worth it.- *Codi Richards*

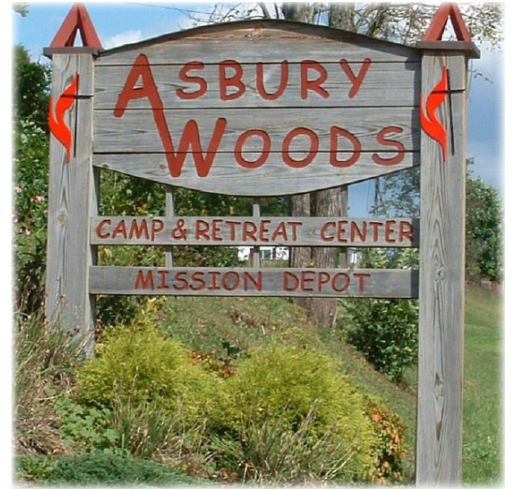


Asbury Woods

By Gayla Van Horn, past camper and current volunteer counselor

Camp is in my blood - it flows through every part of who I am. It has nurtured me in my walk with God, given me a sense of purpose, and built the closest relationships in my life. Pulling on to the gravel road that leads to camp gives me more peace than walking through my own front door.

To read Gayla's full story, visit wvumc.org/news/camp



By Schauna Chambers, past camper and current volunteer counselor

I started attending Asbury Woods as a young child. I loved meeting new people, I loved games, and I loved God; so, camp was the perfect place for me! I went every single year, building friendships and making memories that would last a life time. I can still hear the encouragement of my teammates, hysterical laughter at ridiculous skits, and the sacred sound of quietness during the last campfire. The older I became, the deeper the impact Asbury Woods had on me.

To read Schauna's full story, visit wvumc.org/news/camp



Camp: How one week a summer can make a lasting difference in the spiritual lives of children and youth

By Christy Kniceley Nichols

Sometimes it was a leaf tucked carefully between the pages of my Bible. Sometimes it was special rock. But every time I packed my suitcase to leave camp, I always took some memento with me. My heart would feel so full from the people, from the connection I had made with God that week, from all that “being at church camp” meant, I felt I needed some small remembrance from the sacred week.

I attended church camp every summer at Beckley District Youth Camp from the time I was in 5th grade, serving as a junior counselor when I got too old to be a camper. I also had the opportunity to attend other conference youth events, including a week at Spring Heights. But, frankly, it has been a long time since I was a camper. So, to help me describe the difference that a week at camp can make to a kid, I turned to another experienced camper, my daughter Caroline. Caroline is 12 and has attended camp at Spring Heights every summer since her first two-night “Beginners Camp” in 2011.

“This is how I see it. You have two muscles at camp,” Caroline said, flexing her arms to illustrate. “You have your outdoors muscle and your spiritual muscle. When you’re at camp, you’re walking the whole time, you’re helping build fires, sleeping outside, and carrying your own stuff--you’re working your outdoors muscle. Then, when you’re having your Bible study with your whole camp and your Bible study with your cabin, you’re flexing your spiritual muscle. By the end of camp, both your muscles look pretty awesome.”

“When you’re at camp you are testing your own strength,” Caroline went on. “And the counselors are

trained to put things in a kid’s perspective so it’s easier to understand. And you feel like your counselors are a big support, helping you build your outdoors muscle and your spiritual muscle. They want you to understand things and to chime in and share things. It’s like you’re building a new you, like a New You ‘Version 2.0,’” she says.

This was interesting to me, this idea that camp would help Caroline feel like she was becoming a better version of herself. So I asked her, “When you say ‘New You, You 2.0,’ do you mean that you are getting closer to being the person you think God wants you to be?”

**“It’s an ‘open your eyes’ thing.
...Every time you go,
it’s like another reawakening.
It happens at camp.
It happens every time.”
–Caroline G. Nichols**

“Yes,” she answered. “It’s an ‘open your eyes’ thing,” she said. “The counselors explain things and you can really understand them. And you’re like, ‘this is really what’s been in front of my face the whole time?’ and ‘this is what everybody’s been talking about? This is how Jesus came to

save me--me?’ Every time you go, it’s like another reawakening. It happens at camp. It happens every time.”



Christy's daughters, Caroline and Katie Beth, with their counselors at camp



Katie Beth Nichols, Christy's daughter, enjoying her time at camp

As Caroline described this, I could remember that camp feeling of a “reawakening,” the feeling that I was better for the time I spent with other campers and counselors, and the time I spent listening for God’s voice. The feeling of practicing the good habits of physical activity, Bible study, and worship, and experiencing the quietness of vespers and the flicker of a campfire as the whole camp sings and the sound echoes through the stillness of the night around that glowing circle.

At church camp, the connection between Creator God and all creation (including God’s creation of me) was brought into sharp focus and I was able to see a glimpse of my world and myself through God’s loving eyes. A powerful “reawakening” indeed.

The leaves from Beckley District Youth Camp in the late 80s and early 90s have long since crumbled to dust, and the rocks have been lost along the way. But, the strengthened “spiritual muscle” I gained has proven to be the best memento of all. I am grateful to the counselors, both pastors and lay people, who understood the power of “church camp” and made those experiences possible for me and others year after year. And, I continue to be grateful for those across the conference who

dedicate themselves to the heeding of the Holy Spirit in providing camping opportunities for children and youth like Caroline and my youngest, Katie Beth, who at 8, has done two summers of Beginners Camp and is ready to take on a full week in Summer 2017.

So, who will you help get to camp? Is there a child or grandchild or niece or nephew in your life who needs to have this immersive experience? In addition to the conference-run Spring Heights camping opportunities, there are several other district-operated camps across the conference. The Beckley District Youth Camp I attended is now known as “Camp Celebrate Jesus,” or “Camp CJ,” and serves three districts of the Annual Conference across southern West Virginia. Also, there are weeks for Children and Youth at Asbury Woods in Salt Rock outside of Huntington, and Crossroads Camp near Parkersburg, run by the Little Kanawha District, are open to all children from across the conference. Mon Valley District Camp offers half week camps for youth and children.

As the classic camp song “Pass it On” says, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going/and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing.” Will you help light a spark in the life of a child you know? If so, help send a kid to camp. If your church has a camp scholarship fund, support it, and help make sure that kids are using it. If there is no scholarship fund, consider sponsoring a fundraiser to pay camp fees for the children in your church and in your community. Also, there are volunteer opportunities at the camps themselves. You can make a significant difference in the life of a child through involvement with camp.

My faith journey, and I suspect many of yours, could be described as a series of “reawakenings” that started with camp experiences. With God’s help, I want to make sure children and youth across our conference are able to have camp experiences of their own. Will you join me?

For more information about 2017 summer camp experiences, see the back cover of the magazine.

Christy Kniceley Nichols was named chairperson of the Conference Council on Camping and Outdoor Ministries in 2016. In this role, she works with a dynamic group of leaders from camps across the conference who aim to ensure that every member of the West Virginia Annual Conference understands the camping opportunities available to children and youth and the importance of these experiences in the lives of campers.

I Like camp.
I liked making smores,
and swimming.
we did crafts,
ate lunch.
camp was fun
Braylon

Braylon James, 6 years old
Attended Beginners Camp 2016

I lift my eyes up to the mountains,
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from
THE LORD
the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

Psalms 121:1-2

CALENDAR

Conference Event Highlights - The role of the Conference Calendar is to share the event and business of conference level agencies and ministries.

March

- 10-11** John Wesley's Understanding of Salvation (John XXIII)
- 11** MonValley Lay Servant Academy (Avery UMC)
- 16-19** United Methodist Women Spiritual Growth Retreat
- 17-19** Course of Study
- 31-1** Reaching New People (Grace)

April

Celebration of Mission Events

- 22** Spring Lay Servant Academy (Little Kanawha District)
- 21-22** Reaching New People (Warwood)
- 21-23** Course of Study
- 29-May 6** Pastoral Ministry Licensing School

For full details and event locations, visit the conference calendar online at wvumc.org/events

We Remember

Rev. Clayton Whetsel died Sunday, January 29.

Nellie Gainer died Friday, February 10.

Patricia Kelley died Saturday, February 11.

Francis Posey died Saturday, February 11.

The Monthly Circuit

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Camping Opportunities for Summer 2017

Spring Heights (Spencer, WV)

Camps for ages 5-18, operating from June 11th- July 30th

For additional info visit springheights.org

Asbury Woods (Huntington Area)

Middle and High School Camp- July 9-14

Day Camp- July 16-20 (Kindergarten-2nd grade)

Elementary Camp- July 16-21 (3rd-5th grade)

For additional info visit asburywoodswv.org

Camp Celebrate Jesus/Camp CJ (Summers County 4-H Camp)

Entering 5th grade - Senior High- June 26-30

For additional info call David Peters at 304-949-5983

Crossroads (Parkersburg Area)

Grade School Camp- July 5-8

Middle and High School Camp- July 9-15

For additional info call Lisa Withee at 304-991-8184

MonValley District Camp (Camp Muffly)

Junior Camp- July 23-26 (3rd-6th grade)

Youth Camp- July 26-29 (7th-12th grade)

For additional info call Codi Richards at 304-657-2013