

## **Kids Camp, A Whole Lot Of Something**

by Dick Gruber

“I came to camp with a whole lot of nothing. I am going home with a whole lot of something.”

\* Maria, 10 years old, three-time child of divorce

Camping ministry is summed up in the words of this ten-year-old. Boys and girls across this country are going home with a “whole lot of something” this summer. Kids camp ministry is a five-day glimpse of heaven for many children. Boys and girls walk and talk and play and pray in an environment saturated with Christian principles, behavior expectations, and Bible verses. They are immersed in this godly four or five day ministry which William Coleman in his book entitled, “The Camp Counselor,” equates to “fifty-two weeks of Sunday school in the eternal impact it has on a child.”

I sit and type this in a cabin near Spencer Lake, Wisconsin. It’s early morning. Last night I preached and nearly a hundred boys and girls responded spending over an hour praying at the altars. A good number of these were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues as the Spirit helped them. This scenario has been played out all summer in different kids camps with different evangelists across our fellowship.

I have been counseling, preaching at, or assisting in directing kids camps in our movement since 1979. I have been witness to hundreds of children being saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit, and called in to full-time Christian service. I have prayed with enthusiastic boys and girls to whom Jesus was as close and real as I was. I have prayed with desperate children going home to uncertain circumstances and watched as Jesus gave them hope for the future.

I have watched children praying for children receiving all that God could give. Boys and girls laying hands on one another and encouraging each other to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Two girls at a recent camp approached me and said, “You are awesome, PG. We just received the Holy Spirit and we spoke with tongues and everything!” At the same camp a group of boys announced to me, “We just prayed for him and he’s speaking in tongues!” Children learn to minister one to another at camp.

Camp is a ministry where children see Christianity in action 24 hours a day all week. They witness the good, the bad, and the ugly in their counselors and discover how real people weave Jesus into everyday life. There is an incredible force of volunteer workers that become Christ in the flesh for our kids each summer. One mother, after recently being healed of a debilitating disease that sapped her strength for ten years said to me, “I get to come to camp, sleep on an army cot, run all day with the kids, and help them pray through at the altars. All because God healed me.” What better reason is there to receive divine healing than to give a drink of cool water to a child?

In my children’s pastorate in Minnesota, I had several counselors who took a week of their vacation time each summer to minister to boys and girls as counselors at camp. One of these dads said to me, “I thought I would come to camp and minister to the children. Instead, they have ministered to me.”

This summer, thousands of boys and girls attended kids camps in our districts here in America and around the world. Many declared a personal relationship with Christ for the first time. Many were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit helped them. Many received a life-long call to full-time Christian service. Their lives will never be the same. The future of our movement is being shaped in the ministry settings of our Assemblies of God camps.

As a pastor, you can influence your church in helping to build this vital ministry to children. Your church can give finances, resources, and personnel to your district camp. Many districts allow churches to participate in a spring-cleaning day. In these districts, lay people and pastors join together to clean and spruce up the camp ground prior to the summer camping season. Taking time to promote camp to your congregation early in the year gives people opportunity to set camping dates on their calendar so that they can participate in this important ministry. Above all, pray with your people for upcoming camps. Obtain a district camping schedule and encourage congregation members to pray before during and after camps. Become personally involved. Pastor Dick Vanman serves as camp athletic director here in Wisconsin. The people of his church, and I might add, his own children know that kids camp is an important ministry.

The next time you see a brochure advertising upcoming camps, stop and pray. Ask God what He would have you to do in giving kids a whole lot of something this summer.