

FFWPU USA: 2022 Summer Camps - Kids connect through different activities

Naokimi Ushiroda
August 8, 2022



Photo courtesy of Christophe Murphy

"The summer camp overall was such a great opportunity for all these young families to come together, sharing over parenthood and kids instantly connecting through all the different activities," said Irion Hoffmann Jenkins, FFWPU USA Southeast secretary general. "Kids were just soaking in a lot of content and learning a lot in nature ... my son didn't want to leave."

This year was the first time Jenkins attended Camp Shehaqua, tucked away in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, where she joined more than a hundred participants for a week away in nature. The camp ran back-to-back retreats from July 24 to 29, and Aug. 1 to 6, as well as a family weekend from July 29 to 31. All participants, Jenkins said, took on a role of serving one another - bringing the camp's theme of "Togetherness" to life.



Photo courtesy of Christophe Murphy

"I was a teacher for 4th and 5th graders," shared Jenkins during a recent report for FFWPU USA leaders. "Some people were in the kitchen [preparing meals], while others were group leaders; and every day we

had an inspiring three-hour education session."

Jenkins said even kids pitched in to serve the camp community, helping to build a palpable sense of camaraderie and teamwork. "I was very impressed by our service project there, where kids were serving, with middle and high schoolers volunteering in the kitchen," she said. "My own son was helping serve in the camp kitchen, and I was pretty proud to see that."

Campers also enjoyed a wide range of activities to satisfy just about any interest. From singing and dancing, to learning musical instruments, crafting, and blueberry picking, there was no shortage of things to do individually and as a group.

"Being in nature was wonderful, and the weather was perfect," Jenkins said. "There were campfires during the day and evening. We had marshmallows, and singing, and everyone got together for a candlelight prayer - it was just so nice to have a lot of young families there."

A talent night featured more singing and dancing, as well as fun skits. "It was so cute," said Jenkins, "a lot of high schoolers were very creative ... [The camp] was so much fun and a great time to connect in fellowship and togetherness with our Heavenly Parent, our families, each other, and God's Creation."

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A number of regional summer camps for young Unificationists recently concluded, including Camp KOGAPE in the Midwest. The Pokemon-themed retreat, which drew more than 90 participants, ran from July 31 to Aug 6 at the Camp Wyoming Christian retreat center in Iowa.



Photo courtesy of Camp KOGAPE

"We had lots of fun and bonding activities planned for the youth and the whole family," said a local camp organizer. "This included things like glow-in-the dark 'Capture the Flag,' a Matanage tournament, brother-sister night, family 'Pokemon Snap,' and family Olympics."

Campers, ranging from preschoolers to the elderly, also enjoyed pool time, an entertainment night, and campfire s'mores, as well as various Pokemon-related activities. "It was so nice to spend time with our friends at camp," said one parent. "There were so many loving and caring experiences with our youth."



Our Gift to God



“I learned that no matter what level of faith I have, God still trusts me to direct His children to God and believes I am capable of doing so,” shared a group leader of One Heart Camp in California.

As summer forges on, a number of youth camps have already taken place for Unificationists across the country, while other summer camps are just beginning. In Santa Cruz, One Heart Camp inspired some 56 participants who joined the program from June 19 to 24.

“We had an amazing camp experience right by the beach,” shared Gabby, the YAYAM West coordinator, in a report to FFWPU USA leaders. “A lot of the camp was focused on our gifts that we can give to God, and what God has given to us and how much God loves each and every person.”

Camp participants, including 20 group leaders and 13 core staff, as well as one non-Unificationist, culturally represented some 40 nations coming together. The camp’s theme, “God’s Gift to Us, Our Gift to God” addressed the relationship between human beings and our Heavenly Parent and Creator. Two main speakers, Rev. Kevin Thompson, FFWPU USA West director, and Bay Area Family Church Assistant Pastor Kouki Tamura, delivered inspiring and empowering presentations.

“They spoke on how we are a generation of peace and God has a plan for everyone,” said Gabby. “They also

talked about being ourselves and shared very practical guidance and tips on how to strengthen our conscience and be happy.”

While Pastor Kouki zeroed in on tapping our unlimited potential and the blueprint of the three great blessings – to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the natural world – powerful testimonies from different youth leaders touched the heart of campers.

“God has created a clear blueprint for how to be a happy child of God,” said one participant. “God and my parents need me, and God loves and cares about us. He created us with so much potential, so we have to find it and work hard; and be able to accept the joy and love God gives to us and spend it on others. In doing this, we also return joy and love to God.”

Testimonies addressed gratitude, recognizing God’s love, being filial toward our parents, and cultivating friends of faith. “[The takeaway] was to take off our ‘life sucks’ glasses and put on our ‘life is amazing’ glasses,” shared one participant, who echoed the words of Rev. Thompson’s presentation.

One Heart Camp also featured a worship night and a variety of activities. “We had to be really creative because the campsite was small,” said Gabby. “Throughout the weekend we had a lot of time at the beach, which was a big highlight since it was a 10-minute walk away, and we also went to the beach for a night under the stars with a campfire.”

Camp Lone Star in Texas, Camp Journey in Idaho, and Camp Aurora in New Hampshire all concluded in early July, while the EPIC high school workshop is currently underway in Gloucester, Mass. Camp KOGAPE in Iowa and Camp Shehaqua in Pennsylvania will take place in the coming weeks.

Stay tuned for more reflections from the 2022 summer camps.

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