

To the Florida Mission Center

November 11th, 2023

Greetings

As the Youth Ministries Leader for the Florida Mission Center, I greet you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is an honor and privilege to work with the Youth Council, our Camp Directors and staff and especially our young people. That is where my heart has always been – reaching young people for Christ.

We have amazing, dedicated individuals working with our youth in the camping program. It takes all of us meeting regularly (the 2nd week of each month), planning all year, and continuing to grow as leaders for a successful camping program to make a difference in a young person's life. One special outcome this year was seeing one of our young people, Logan Sisley, get baptized at Deerhaven at our Memorial Day Retreat. Those are the results we're after! We want to see our young people make that commitment to follow Jesus into the waters of baptism and develop their own relationship with Christ.

As the previous two years were concentrated on rebuilding our camping program after the Covid pandemic, in the coming year I will be turning my attention to our individual congregations or faith communities to see how we can promote youth programs and activities within our local faith communities. Many of our campers don't attend our churches regularly and it's my heart's desire to see that turned around. Beyond that, I will be working closely with Jacob Blakesley, our Invitational Support Minister, to help our congregations with outreach opportunities to strengthen or develop youth activities and programs at the local levels. After all, our youth are our future. I would encourage each of you to think and pray about ways we can grow our churches with new families. What are the needs in your community that we, as a

church, can help meet? Who are the unchurched in your community? If we are to invite others to Christ, to begin with, we must be intentional in our approach. This involves meeting new people, reaching out a hand to help when we see a need, offering to pray for them, inviting them to church, a family game night, a movie night, a campfire service that's more relaxed than our traditional Sunday services, a meal in our homes or at the church, a fall festival or Advent services, a retreat or camp. We may have to step out of our comfort zones and look for new opportunities to reach our communities. Over and over I have seen, if you get the children, you get the parents who in turn invite their families and friends.

This year, we had great responses to our summer camps and SPEC with Junior High and Senior High combined once again. We implemented our Director in Training Program this year with Melissa Nations co-directing after a year of mentoring with Laura Moose for our Junior High/Senior High camp. Melissa will be training Chloe Conway for our upcoming winter retreat in January of 2024. Registration is open now. Just go to youthcamps.weebly.com. Our SPEC coordinator, Jane Sisley, was successful in getting the majority of our senior high campers registered for SPEC. We had a very positive group that traveled to Graceland representing Florida as part of the SEA delegation this year. We are seeing our youth grow and develop in their relationship with Christ as well as leadership roles. They have great relationships with one another and love the camping program. The disconnect is that doesn't translate into attendance in our local churches throughout the year. We must find a way to make that connection.

With the leadership of our Youth Council Chairperson, Laura Moose, we have developed a Director's Manual, and we will be offering a Director's Training at Deerhaven on January 24th. This will include

current directors as well as future directors who have expressed an interest in being mentored and trained to take on the role one day.

2024 Camps: Our first camp of the year 2024 will be **Youth Retreat at Deerhaven January 19-21**

Jr. High/Sr. High Camp – June 16-22

Junior Camp – June 23-27

SPEC – July 12-20

So, pastors, Youth Leaders and schedulers please look at your calendars and let's plan some dates for me to come to your congregation and hold special services or activities. I would like to visit a few congregations each quarter, we would like to consider offering activities at your congregations i.e. lock-in's, movie or game nights and fund raisers to help cover camperships, etc. I will be calling you regularly to discuss ways we can help develop and or grow your youth program. Another consideration would be an after-school program helping young people with their homework, giving them a safe place to be until parents get home, mentoring programs, etc. (I am currently researching with world church to see if there are any legal/liability concerns with doing that). We can offer pre-baptismal classes to all ages as well as the Certified Youth Worker classes. I will be in Lakeland November 19, 2023, to minister and offer the refresher course.

For those of you who say you don't have any young people in your congregation, I would like to help you change that by helping you interact with local groups in your community to reach out to families that are unchurched and "bring them in". After all, there are more things to offer our youth in our own communities than just the camps.

Thank you one and all for supporting our youth!