

To the Florida Mission Center

November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### ***Greetings***

As the Youth Ministries Leader for the Florida Mission Center, I greet you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I feel honored and privileged to work with the Youth Council, our Camp Directors and staff, and especially our young people.

The Florida Mission Center was excited to be offering youth camps once again this summer after 2 years due to COVID. We knew it would be a rebuilding year, but I am happy to report it was a successful year in that great camps were offered and we carried out our mission to minister to the needs of the youth of our Mission Center through quality programs in a camp setting. We have great leaders, ongoing training for those in leadership and mentoring for future leaders. We take seriously the safety and well-being of our youth and camping staff so additional measures were put in place to ensure that our camping program provided a safe environment as well as addressing the physical, intellectual and spiritual needs of our young people while building relationships that promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace.

### **2022 Camps:**

We had a great Junior camp with 12 in attendance. Betsy Stormer does a fabulous job as Director. This year's theme was "Around the World with Jesus" where campers learned customs, dances, foods, and beliefs of 4 different countries in-depth and many others in diverse places. We had 2 who came from the surrounding community from flyers that had been placed around town. Many didn't want to leave when camp was over and expressed that they couldn't wait to return next year. Our

Junior Camp is so important because it establishes relationships among the youth that often connect them for a lifetime.

Our Junior High/Senior High Camp was combined with 17 in attendance with 5 being Junior High Age and 12 being Senior High age.

Junior/Senior High Camp had some challenges this year. The Director, Carol Harrison tested positive for COVID the morning that camp was to start. This “pushed” Melissa Nations, the co-director, and others to step up to the plate and do more. I will have to say, everyone went above and beyond to make sure our young people had a positive camping experience. Another challenge included the cost due to a shortage of nurse coverage. Jane Sisley (who was already committed to our Junior Camp as nurse) but who responded when called upon really out-did herself by coming many of the days/nights in addition to working her job and taking care of her family. Beyond that, we had to hire EMT’s from the local Lake County Fire Department and while they were awesome, they were expensive. About \$1850 was spent on salaries for the two EMT’s to cover the days/nights Jane couldn’t be there. So, the camp was in the red. But the Mission Center expected it would be in the red so we were prepared for it. However, despite some staffing challenges we had fabulous experiences in the classes offered, great participation in the Pastor’s class and fabulous campfire sessions which were led by Chloe Conway, who is also on our Youth Council. Chloe did a fantastic job! We have other young people who have grown up in our camping program, became CIT’s and now Counselors who are very dedicated to our camping program and are being mentored to become future leaders/directors, etc. So, our camping program has a bright future.

### **Upcoming 2023 Camps:**

Winter Retreat – January 20-22 – This will be a combined Junior High/Senior High retreat again this year.

May 26-29 – Memorial Day Reunion – this will be led by the Clearwater congregation, my home congregation, and we plan to use this as a springboard to promote our summer camps. We will set aside one session where I will be inviting each director to come and as many staff as possible, to be there to share about their respective camps they will be leading. So, we strongly encourage as many as possible to attend the Memorial Day Reunion and bring as many youth with you as possible. We will be offering classes for them that will be similar to what they would experience at camp in the summer program.

Jr. High/Sr. High Camp – June 18-24 – This will be a combined camp led by Laura Moose and Melissa Nations – This year’s theme will be “Under Construction – Work in Progress”

Junior Camp – June 25-29 led once again by Betsy Stormer

Spectacular – July 14-22 and once again being led by Jane Sisley as our SEA coordinator.

**Promotions for next year’s camps.** There is a group of volunteers that are planning to travel to the various congregations and offer campfire type services and to encourage early enrollment in the summer camps. So, pastors and schedulers please look at your calendars and let me know good dates for us to come to your congregation and hold these special services. Additionally, we would like to consider offering activities at your congregations, i.e. lock-ins, movie or game nights and fund raisers to help cover camperships, etc. If your Youth Directors are interested, please get in touch with me right away so we can start coordinating these activities. For those of you who say you don’t have any young people in your congregation, we’d 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”. Something to keep in mind is that some of the so called, “mega

churches” offer day camps but not sleep away camps. So, we would encourage each congregation to make connections and let them know we offer a sleep away camp that their youth may be interested in attending.

A couple of incentives to encourage more attendees to our camps are to promote early registration by moving the discount a month out vs. 3 weeks out to help get a head count to more adequately staff the camp. We will also be offering a prize for the camper who brings the most friends to camp in each age group.

And finally, another interest that has been presented to us is to offer a weekend retreat to those young adults who grew up in our camping program and consider Deerhaven a very important part of their experience. We will be looking at the best time to offer that. We also hope this will either get them involved in our congregations again as well as sending their own children to our camps so they may enjoy the same type of experiences.

All in all, I am very encouraged in the youth of our Mission Center. We have a strong, core group committed and dedicated to developing younger disciples to serve through our camping program and in our congregations. We have the tools and people to grow our congregations and our camping program. It’s time to put plans into action! So, congregational leaders, if I haven’t heard from any of you by the time we have our January Winter Retreat, be expecting me to ask for time with you during Winter Reunion to discuss plans to come to your congregation.

Thank you one and all for supporting our youth!