

The Link to a Place Apart



A CYCLE OF RETURNED LOVE



Like a lot of campers, Macy Kennedy's first experience at camp was in the 6th grade. "My church, Christ Lutheran in Cape Coral took us to Campfirmation at Luther Springs," she shared. "I didn't know what to expect, but I was completely hooked on camp after that! My counselor was so awesome. I wanted to be a counselor just like her someday."

Macy's counselor that first summer was Kelsey Johnson. "I remember Macy," Kelsey shared. "Our paths have crossed again since that summer she was my camper." Kelsey not only remembers Macy from that summer, but she remembers how critical her time at camp was for her own spiritual growth and identity.

"Being on summer staff at camp was such a formidable experience," Kelsey shared. "There is such power in the community and the ministry that happens there. Thinking back to that summer, I was in a tough spot spiritually, but camp gave me the space to explore deeper truths that did not feel possible inside the church building. Being in nature while exploring faith was new for me. I was able to be myself in God's creation and with the community. That summer helped me identify a call to ministry. The type of community that camp brings to life, is what I feel called to build and nurture in other places." Kelsey went on from camp to serve as an ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) in the Holy Land in 2017. After that, she served as part of the ELCA Advocacy team, learning about and working for solutions for hunger at the state public policy office. Today, Kelsey is in her second year at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. "We can talk about community, but at summer camp, God's community is lived out." Kelsey is exploring a call to a transformative community that addresses trauma and the whole person. "I feel called to build community in our fragmented and changing world. I still lean on the leadership skills I learned at camp for creating healthy community."

Like her favorite counselor, Macy also finds herself answering a call to ministry and is attending seminary at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, SC. "I feel called to help connect environmental studies and faith," she shared. Macy describes her call as an extension of her time at camp. Like so many before her, she wanted to "grow up to be just like her counselor someday." This tradition and cycle of returned love, as she describes it, is at the heart of the impact camp has on children, youth, summer staff, and adults. "Camp kept calling me back for 10 summers. It is the place I can be fully myself. It is the place that builds a servant's heart. It is the place you do things and try things you would never do in your normal life. Camp is the place where vulnerable connections are formed. It creates a cycle of returned love."

Kelsey, like so many summer staff before her, instilled these camp values in Macy. Kelsey was humbled to hear how Macy described her and the impact she had on her life. "The greatest compliment I ever got was overhearing a camper talk about me the way I felt about Kelsey when I was in 6th grade. That was when I realized power and importance of the cycle of returned love that only camp can create."

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