

The Link to a Place Apart



CONNECTIONS EVERYWHERE

Sam and Gina Winemiller served on summer staff at Lutheridge for multiple summers between 2010 and 2019. “Sam’s entire family grew up connected to camp,” Gina shared. “Luther Springs hosts their Day Camp at Faith Lutheran Church in Sarasota, FL, and the whole family stays on site for the big Florida game each year. His home congregation attends Campfirmation at Lutherock. Sam’s parents, Pastor Steve and Tricia, were on summer staff at Lutheridge in the 80’s. They attended family camp at Lutheridge and served as volunteer Bible study C3ARE leaders.”

For Gina, it was different. Gina grew up attending St. David's Lutheran in Lexington, SC and attended Lutheridge only one time for Campfirmation. "Other school and extracurricular activities seemed to get in the way of summer camp each year," she shared. "But when I started as a freshman at Clemson [University], I got connected with [Lutheran] Campus Ministry. That is how I ended up at camp for my first summer on staff. The other students and Pastor Chris [Heavner] encouraged me to apply. It felt like a Holy Spirit moment," Gina shared.

"Sam and I met while on staff in 2012. We were in the same prayer partner group and became good friends. In 2016, we started dating." Sam and Gina recognized the relationship and community building skills they learned as counselors also translated into building a strong marriage. Together, they intentionally sought out the same Christian community they experienced at camp. "There is nothing like the summer staff community. Sam and I seek that out, especially since the pandemic started. We started a virtual book club. We play games on Zoom with close friends mostly from camp, and we visited a number of virtual churches after moving to Cary, NC. It has been a blessing to worship with our fellow staff members who now serve as pastors in congregations." Sam and Gina have made Christ the King Lutheran in Cary their new church home and are taking new member classes now.

Camp also taught them the importance of being consistent in their daily faith practices. "You just pray more at camp," said Gina. "It's on your mind. You pray with and for your campers and staff all the time. Away from camp, it seems prayer isn't the first thing you think of, so Sam and I have tried hard to make it a priority." Together they identify events and decisions that seem important and intentionally pray together as they navigate them.

The leadership and relationship skills Sam and Gina learned at camp are invaluable to them, and they want to see that continue for years to come. "On the Day of Giving last July, we started a monthly gift. It wasn't much, because I wasn't working at the time, but we wanted to do something." As young summer staff alumni, their camp experiences and lessons have remained with them in their new careers and marriage. Their generosity is not only an effort to give back in response to what God has done for them through camp, but to also keep camp strong for future generations.

"Camp connections are everywhere," said Gina. "Because of Covid, the world lost a whole summer of making those connections and teaching the faith practices. Camp is a gift for everyone who comes, children, staff, and adults. Getting that back is important. We all need camp."

Sam just finished his PhD in Sports Sociology from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Gina serves as an elementary school librarian in Raleigh.