

The Link to a Place Apart



UNAPOLOGETICALLY ME



“Mom, I want to be a counselor when I grow up!” As a seventh-grade camper at Lutherock, Kristen Hitchcock was hooked on camp. It only took one week for her to know camp was the place for her. “I have not strayed from camp since that summer.” As a self-proclaimed, “flip-flop girl” from Florida, she found herself on staff at Luther Springs for 5 summers.

“Looking back, I see that my love of camp had to do with the counselors. They were warm and welcoming. They were accepting of all of us regardless of who we were. Camp was a safe place for me to be me. I could be the person that God created. I could be unapologetically me.”

Kristen, like all of us, felt the huge void that no summer camp in 2020 meant for her life. Today, she serves as the Director of Student and Family Ministry at the Lutheran Church of the Cross in St. Petersburg Florida. “My youth missed camp so much. To help them cope this year, we mailed out crafts like friendship bracelet kits. We made them as we chatted over Zoom, but it was not a replacement for camp.” Kristen works each year to bring the children and youth in her congregation to Luther Springs because she wants them to know the same sense of belonging that she felt.

A study by the American Camp Association (ACA) found significant growth in children’s social-emotional skills after a session of summer camp, including self-esteem, independence, leadership, friendship skills, social comfort, positive values, and decision-making skills. They reported that 65% of parents said their child gained self-confidence by attending summer camp and 92% of campers said camp helped them feel good about themselves. This positive impact of camp is evident in Kristen’s story and she is witness to the growth that happened for the youth in her congregation.

“The true work of camp happens the day the camper leaves. They go back and put to work what they learned at camp.” When someone feels the unconditional welcome of God at summer camp, when they know God has claimed them forever, they are better able to show that same sense of welcome to others. We all know children in our communities and churches who would benefit from a week of summer camp. It isn’t too late to encourage them to register. Sometimes, that little extra word of encouragement from an adult makes all the difference.

Visit www.novusway.org for more stories or to register for camp!