



NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Spirit-Led Summers at Bear Creek Camp

Written by: Stacey Burke, Communications and BCC NEPA Synod Representative

"I'm always struck by the simple but profound technologies that camp employs to build healthy, loving, Christ-centered community: silly songs and deep conversations, skits and games, shared meals and rituals." These words from Pastor Inge Williams of Friedens Lutheran in Shartlesville, a 2025 summer chaplain at Bear Creek Camp, reflect the deep joy and quiet transformation that unfold in the woods each season.

All Together was the theme this summer, focusing on growing stronger through love and service, grace-filled faith, and belonging and community. Pastor Inge witnessed this connection firsthand early in the summer

when she served as one of the camp chaplains during Family Camp. Pastor Inge shared, "On one of the first nights, I saw one of the former youth Synod Council representatives, now serving as a counselor this summer, give a high five to a toddler from Ireland who was running all over the field during a kickball game. The kindness and connection across ages, and even international borders, really exemplified what Family Camp is about."

While chapel time and worship services are typically led by the young adult summer staff, camp chaplains provide spiritual support throughout the week, leading devotions and Bible studies for campers and staff. They offer encouragement, listening ears, and join in the fun that camp has to offer. Throughout the summer, three Northeastern PA Synod pastors brought their time, energy, and Spirit-led presence to Bear Creek Camp as chaplains. Pastor Inge Williams and Pastor Jennifer Heavner of Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church served during Family Camp, while Pastor Liz Koerner of St. John Lutheran in Stroudsburg closed out the season as chaplain during the final week.

The partnership with Bear Creek Camp, shared with the Southeastern PA Synod, is especially meaningful to our synod, as the values of camp and synod closely align. Both are deeply committed to building relationships and belonging across congregations, generations, and diverse communities. As synod, we continue to search for ways to raise leaders who serve with compassion, creativity, and courage in the church and the world, which is why our partnership with Bear Creek Camp is so important. It is prioritizing youth and allowing them space to search for ways to serve others as a natural response to God's love.



Serving others was the theme of one of Pastor Liz's Bible studies during her week as chaplain. When she met with the Junior campers (grades 2-4), she asked how they might take the ways they serve others at camp and apply them at home and in their school communities. Helping others at camp can seem second nature, especially after a full week of being together. However, campers are not only learning how to be kind to one another. They are learning life skills that will stay with them long after the week ends.

Throughout the week, they are learning how to be confident and independent through overnight tent camping experiences. They are learning about teamwork and communication as they encourage each other on high rope activities. They grow spiritually through the guidance of our chaplains, who are a daily presence within the camp schedule and help shape campers' understanding of faith and their connection to God.

We are extremely grateful for the passion and dedication of Pastor Inge, Pastor Jennifer, and Pastor Liz, who devoted their time this past summer, and for the ongoing work of Bear Creek Camp as it builds inclusive community, nurtures faith, and develops leaders who carry their experiences into the world with empathy, joy, and purpose. This certainly could not be accomplished without the hardworking, compassionate summer staff and the leadership of Executive Director Collin Grooms, Program Director Kallie Handlong, and all the other camp leaders who contribute and put youth first.

Camp doesn't end when the summer does. In addition to summer camp, Bear Creek Camp offers retreats and camps outside of the summer timeframe including the upcoming Labor Day Family Camp, Fall Women's Retreat, and Winter Camp. The camp is also open to hosting congregations, committees, or organizational retreats through their facility rentals. All this information and more can be found at bearcreekcamp.org. All together, Bear Creek Camp and our synod continue to walk hand in hand, creating space for love, service, and faith to flourish in every season.



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