

Biggest Lovin' Life Day Camp Ever

Debbie Grodner, Iris Quesada and Ariana Moon

August 8, 2012



The Day Camp also included a field trip and a picnic at the Bear Mountain Zoo, where, according to Grodner, the children "had a blast."

Lovin' Life Ministries' (LLM) five-week summer day camp concluded its second yearly session with a record number of 68 participants at the Harriman State Park in the Rockland- and Orange Counties of New York, a location also known as "Camp Sunrise." The participants of the "Lovin' Life Day Camp," whose ages ranged from 7-13, were from local communities such as New Jersey, Queens, Westchester, Orange- and Rockland Counties, and for the first time included several from the Korean Evangelical Association (KEA).



Young campers enjoy an afternoon of arts & crafts, which often took place after a morning of swimming.

Debbie Grodner, the "Camp Mother" in charge of overseeing the program, said, "I felt God's blessing coming through Senior Pastor Rev. In Jin Moon with this victory. I also felt God's protection in the fact that we hosted so many children without any accidents or injuries.

"In the beginning, it was clear that many of the children didn't know each other and had met at camp for the first time. As time passed, however, strangers turned into friends. Many don't live near other children from our church, and the day camp was an opportunity to meet and play and form bonds with them on a daily basis.

"Also, a number of children have no brothers or sisters and are awkward at relationships or immature in their behavior. These children especially benefited from being with an extended family of brothers and sisters. The friendships are so important! These children will be peers, supporting and caring for each other as they experience growing up. It struck me that something awesome and profound was quietly unfolding here."



The second annual Lovin' Life Day Camp reached a new record at 68 participants for the five-week program.

Lovin' Life Day Camp's Daily Schedule

Each morning began with a meeting for prayer and a brief reading of Unification Church Founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon's words, which the children were encouraged to put into action throughout the day. Afterwards, the children participated in free swimming lessons, followed by lunch and an afternoon of arts & crafts, sports and more swimming. At 3:30 p.m., the children would meet in the dining room for a snack and at 4:00 p.m., they would return home, either picked up by their parents at the Day Camp or driven home in vans by camp counselors.

"This year, by the end of camp, six children who had originally failed their deep water swim tests passed, after instruction over the weeks. They were so proud and were cheered on by the other campers," Grodner said. "Also, this year's arts & crafts program was the big hit. Great works of art and fearsome weapons were crafted using only cardboard, wood and duct tape."



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Once a week, naturalists from the National Park Service brought animals and taught about nature through games and short hikes. In addition, Victor Quesada, a Unification-born youth from Gloucester, MA visited to demonstrate how to respect God's creations.

"As an Eagle Scout, I helped the campers identify what trees are which and how they are useful to people," said Quesada. "Trees are large organisms that no one pays attention to because they are everywhere, much like how God can seem. Nature is part of what God created so to understand creation is to understand him. I explained how interconnected everything is and how every piece of nature is connected to every other piece all the time."

According to Grodner, the Day Camp's schedule also included a field trip and a picnic at the Bear Mountain Zoo. "The children had a blast there," she said. "Also, another treat for the children came from Larry Benaloga, a Filipino Unificationist who teaches martial arts at the Lovin' Life Learning Center. He is an aquarium expert and set up two 55-gallon tanks in the dining hall and put fish from the lake into the tanks. The children could view all the kinds of fish that dwell in the lake up close. They were mesmerized."

Camp concluded with an arts & crafts competition and group skits on Friday, August 3rd, a day of many tearful goodbyes.



Camp counselor Jennifer Theriot receives attention from an affectionate participant of the Lovin' Life Day Camp.

Thanks to the Lovin' Life Day Camp Staff!

In conclusion, Grodner said, "The children had an amazing time because of the care and attention given to them by the counselors and the director, SunJo Hendricks. Sunjo has eleven years of camp-staffing experience coupled with a deep love for children, boundless energy and creativity. He is kind, respectful and strict when he has to be, but a whole lot of fun, too. He knows clearly how to guide the counselors. The counselors took excellent care of the children and in return the kids adored them.

"Xaver Clarke and Amy Murray led the Kitchen Team, and everyone really invested their hearts in preparing delicious and nutritious food. The meals were simple and kid-friendly, like turkey tacos, BBQ chicken and mashed potatoes, curry and rice, and spaghetti and meatballs, but because of the love invested into preparing it, the children said it was the best food they ever had. Also, the Kitchen Team poured their devotion and creativity into the daily snacks to create wonderful treats such as cookies, apple cobbler, granola bars, fruit-kabobs and goey chocolate brownies with ice-cream. The kitchen fulfilled the comforting role of mother to the kids.

"I am so grateful and honored to be working with the Lovin' Life Day Camp and am determined to follow Rev. In Jin Moon's lead, putting Unificationist-born youth as staff members in the key positions and supporting them from behind, in a motherly way. These young people are amazingly talented, creative and have great depth and sensitivity of heart. I am so proud of them and can only wonder what impact they will have on this world. The Day Camp staff is reviewing our season and looking forward to making next year's camp even better."



Thanks to the Day Camp's free swimming lessons, all who wanted to enjoy the pool on a hot summer day were given the opportunity to do so.

Lovin' Life Day Camp Staff of 2012

Camp Director: SunJo Hendricks, 24, from NJ

Assistant Camp Director: Hyoshin Clarke, 20, from Westchester, NY

Health Director: Marilyn Onoda, from West Haverstraw, NY.

Waterfront Director/Swim Instructor: Alex Gaigg, 22, from Westwood, NJ.

Volunteers: the Theriot Family, Larry Benaloga, Fernando Castellanos, Rebecca Hori, Michael Martinez, Cody Morris, and Mario Mendoza.

Camp Mother: Debby Grodner, from Tarrytown, NY.



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