

## FFWPU Northeast USA: Better Together - Camp Aurora 2021

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50 campers and 17 staff from multiple states and Canada gathered together August 1-7 for Camp Aurora: Special Edition in Gloucester, MA. Due to COVID constraints we were not able to utilize our usual location, Geneva Point Center on beautiful lake Winnepesaukee in NH. Undeterred, and acknowledging the needs of our younger brothers and sisters to gather and connect, Camp Aurora leadership made the commitment to meet in person by hosting a smaller than usual camp at Morning Garden.

In the months leading up to camp, staff met via zoom weekly to plan the theme, educational content, and activities. We are incredibly grateful to the staff for their investment and long-term commitment to this important youth ministry.

### **Learning together**

Through discussion, and drawing on inspiration from God, we created the theme "Better Together". Our staff felt that after the past year that has been characterized by so much social isolation, it was imperative that we create a joyful camp experience that highlights our interconnectedness. While divisiveness can break down a community, highlighting the value in one another can create a powerful force that spurs meaningful transformation. This so necessary in today's world.

Through the seven days, we explored how we are Better Together with God, Better Together with Family, Better Together in Community, and Better Together in relationship with ourselves.

Each day expanded on a different aspect of the theme. We communicated through morning services; age appropriate, interactive morning educational sessions, team building activities, and camp theater. The camp theater built younger campers' understanding of the theme. One skit explored what could have happened if Cain and Abel had understood they were better together. Another displayed Mother Moon's challenge of being lonely as a child while living on Cheju Island and how she became stronger receiving God's love through nature (better together with God and the creation). Father Moon's course in prison was explored by middle school boys. The costumes were incredibly creative!

Older campers asked really good questions about their faith, our teachings and lifestyle through Q and A sessions and discussion groups. Directors and group leaders invested in preparing interesting and practical presentations to help campers understand how the Divine Principle is applied in real life.

## **Living together in community**

The ties that bind us run deep and Camp Aurora is one of the spaces that foster development of relationships. An important part of Camp Aurora is buddies! We pair high schoolers with middle and elementary school campers so that older campers can experience caring for and being a role model for younger campers. Younger campers also experience the care and love of an older brother or sister. While the buddy "system" is intentional, the relationships and joy that occur are spontaneous. It shows up in beautiful and unexpected interactions during camp and in the subsequent school year. Someone new to Camp Aurora this year commented, "This is giving campers a living opportunity to practice the Divine Principle. We are truly practicing what we preach."

## **Having fun together**

Camp activities included Song Fest, sports, arts and crafts, and fun at the beach. Special thanks to our energetic sports coordinators who organized a game of Quidditch for the buddies. Camp Aurora Idol provided the opportunity for campers to share their unique talents. We enjoyed classical piano, rap, and host of other styles. Some campers took well-known songs and changed the words to tell the story of their camp experience. We have some very talented youth in our community!



## **Better Together in their own words**

Campers wrote reflections about their experience. The following statements reflect other multiple very similar answers. Responses are too numerous to detail!

### **What was your favorite presentation?**

"I loved the morning service about how we have a global family, and you are not alone."

"I love the presentation on Better Together with God."

"All the content because it made me think more about community."

"I discovered I feel God through nature and contemplation, which I had never thought about before."

What have you learned that you will take home with you?

"I learned ways to connect to God."

"I learned that God loves me."

"I realized I need to work on my relationships"

"I realized that I love to listen to others. I learned our differences make us unique. We each bring something special to our family."

"I need to talk with my family more - we are better together."

"I need to show and tell people how I appreciate them."

"I shouldn't judge people on first encounter."

"I can connect to God in lots of different ways."

"I got the answers to many questions I had."

"God is everywhere whether you believe in Him or not. God works through people and nature."

"The importance of having someone to talk to."

There were too many comments to mention them all! We thank each camper for your feedback.



### **Thank You All!**

A special thank you to ALL of our dedicated staff, group leaders and the kitchen staff who worked tirelessly to produce delicious meals. We are so grateful to have hosted Camp Aurora and for the time together in community. Camp Aurora is committed to embodying a culture of heart that our youth can bring back home and into their own communities. It has been a treasure to grow and create a powerful future with each person who attended Camp Aurora this year. We look forward to next year!