

Bay Area Young Adult Ministry's remote autumn weekend to connect with God

Gabriela von Euw
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In northeastern California, vast meadows, pristine mountain lakes, networks of forest trails, and numerous hydrothermal sites with lava rocks and bubbling pools of mud all encompass Lassen Volcanic National Park, where a group of young Unificationists camped for a remote autumn weekend to connect with God.

About 20 young adults from the Bay Area spent October 9 to 11 immersed in the sights and sounds of the great outdoors. The trip, organized by the local Young Adult Ministry (YAM) team, centered on building an authentic relationship with God. Adventurers had daily fellowship, personal reflection time, and experienced physical and mental challenges through activities such as hiking.



"Although we were physically hiking up a mountain and challenging our bodies, internally our hike represented the greater efforts that are needed to be taken in life," said Gabriela von Euw, a YAM team

leader. "As we began the hike, the sun was rising right by our side as if God was protecting us the entire way. The higher we climbed, the clearer we could see the colors of the sky transforming seamlessly into one another and could watch the clouds swim through the distant mountains before our eyes."

A highlight of the trip, the group was able to summit Lassen Peak, the highest point of the national park which involves a strenuous five-mile trek roundtrip.



"It was a cold crisp morning as we gathered at the bottom of the hike," said von Euw. "Everyone was bundled up in what felt like at least five layers."

Still, the group pushed through brutal winds and dipping temperatures on their mountain ascent.

"We shared words of encouragement with one another despite the freezing conditions," said von Euw. "And as we reached the top of the mountain, we celebrated our accomplishment and were gifted with a breathtaking view as clouds momentarily cleared away. It felt like God was giving us a glimpse of His Creation because we worked so hard to reach the top."



More hikes over the weekend included a nearby waterfall, Bumpass Hell trail, and the Hydrothermal Area near an active volcano.

"I was amazed to realize that a long time ago, this national park was a single volcano," said camper Ayami Tateno. "It must have erupted many times, covering the land in ash and leaving it a barren rock. But now, I can see how the land healed and became beautiful all over again -- it's covered in forests, and lakes and creeks, and it has a night sky to make you stare in wonder."



"It fills me with hope," she said. "And a determination to extend that kind of beauty and wonder to all other places in the world, and to my brothers and sisters who don't get to feel that kind of joy."

The group had a chance to reflect each day as they discussed the importance of deepening their personal relationships with God. YAM team member G. Quilates guided small group sessions designed to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and ways to naturally connect with God.

"We are not only different on the outside," said Quilates. "We are also spiritually different and gifted with many ways that we personally connect with God."

"It was refreshing to finally spend time with God alone," said von Euw. "Many of us have been busy with school, working, and learning how to balance life. The unpredictable weather challenges we faced while camping were also a unique opportunity for us to work together in unity and bond together."

Shared meals, tents, and even meditation and healing stretches led by camper Julia Chai further helped the group to tap into the healing and transformative power of God's love amidst nature.

"Being outdoors for a couple of days was a very much needed break," said camper Young Joo Scharf. "I felt I could connect more clearly to my original mind and refresh my spirit for coming back to school, work, and other activities. The message I felt from God was that I need to go back to the basics; back to what is important to me and making that a priority in my life."

"As life gets busy, there are times when we unknowingly push God off to the side," added von Euw. "It is important to create intentional time and space for connection with God to help us deepen our relationship with Him. So many people experience God through nature."

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