

Tennessee Young People's Retreat

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The 2021 Tennessee young people's retreat was held August 9 to 13 by Providence, Hudsonville, Unity, and First (Holland) Protestant Reformed Churches. The retreat took place at Eagle Rock Retreat Center in the city of Tallassee. It was about an eleven-hour drive, give or take a bit due to stops for food and restrooms. Though it was a lengthy trip, the beautiful scenery made it worth the drive.

The retreat center was situated high up in the Smoky Mountains. As we looked out from the lodge, the mountains and trees rolled on into the horizon as far as the eye could see. We witnessed the greatness of God's creation everywhere we went. From the rivers on which we canoed and tubed, to the clear blue skies over the mountains, we were surrounded by God's amazing handiwork each day. It is incredible to think that even with what finite faith we have, God can use it to move mountains, something so vast and overwhelming. What a great and powerful God we have! David writes of this in Psalm 36:6: "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep." It ought to be a great comfort to us that our God is the God who created the mountains, whose righteousness and love for us far exceeds even the largest mountain we can see.

The camp at the retreat center consisted of four main buildings. These included a bunkhouse, a dining hall, a lodge, and a barn. The bunkhouse had two separate rooms, one for boys and one for girls, each with fifteen to twenty bunk beds inside. There was room inside to relax as well, although everyone mostly went outside or to the lodge during free time. The dining hall held both indoor and outdoor seating, and we were provided three meals a day, which included a variety of food. The lodge was a large central building that functioned as our meeting place, as well as an area to socialize and relax. Last there was the barn, which contained a ping pong table, a room for Professor Gritters and his wife, and the gift shop.

Several different activities were held for young people to participate in. Everyone got to choose two activities from a list that included paintball, canoeing, a high ropes course, rock climbing, and arts and crafts. Tubing down the river and hiking were activities that everyone participated in. On the last day, a tournament was held between several teams in which various games were played. Each team had to provide one member to participate in every game. The games included a wheelbarrow race, shot put, a hula hoop contest, and several other exciting competitions. There were also games played between the teams as a whole, such as the rock-paper-scissors race and thaw-the-frozen-T-shirt. Even when no activities were being held, there were games available to play during free time, such as Spikeball, bean bag, and CROSSNET.

Most importantly, everyone enjoyed covenant fellowship with one another. We were spiritually edified in both our discussions and the speeches. Our theme for the convention was “Contending for the Faith.” We split into discussion groups and talked about what “contending” means for us as young people, and how this shows itself in our Christian walk. We discussed what this looks like in our day-to-day lives regarding our interactions both with others of like faith and with those who are not fellow believers. This discussion was beneficial for all, as opportunity was given to witness to one another while also learning to witness to everyone around us of the reason for the hope that is within us.

Two speeches were given by Professor Gritters over the course of the retreat. The speeches were very profitable, shedding light on how Christians ought to contend for the faith as they journey through their young-adult life. One point that really hit home was when Professor Gritters said that it doesn’t matter what anyone thinks of you, because if you live your life for God alone and contend for the faith, no one will be able to say any evil of you. All true believers will love and respect those who share a like faith and share a love for our God.

Though the denomination-wide convention was canceled for this year and the retreat was attended by a much smaller group, it was still incredibly beneficial and enjoyable! There were even some aspects of having a smaller group that made it better than a large convention. Traveling was easier with fewer people, and having a smaller group allowed us to spread out for activities in different areas of the mountains. Discussion groups were more personal as well. It was disappointing not to be able to spend time with all our friends, but it did allow everyone to get to know some other young people with whom we typically don’t spend time. It was also a great opportunity to make some new friends!

Ask anyone who attended this retreat, and you’ll find that Christ used this opportunity for the edification of his church. Not only were we able to enjoy God’s amazing creation, but we were able to do so with other believing young people. We were also able to learn of God’s goodness and how to live our lives entirely for him, whether that was by the speeches we heard, our in-depth discussions, or simply through our fellowship with his people. These retreats are fantastic opportunities for the young people of the church, and it is my hope that the young people can continue to develop in their faith by this means in the years to come.

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