



Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
Youth Program
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St. Tikhons Summer Camp



January 17th, 2024

Venerable and Godbearing Father Anthony the Great (356). Ven. Anthony of Dymsk (Novgorod—ca. 1224).
Ven. Anthony of Chernoezérsk (16th c.).

Dear Vladyka, Reverend Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters of the Diocese
Glory to Jesus Christ!
Glory forever!

Master Bless!

I write to you with extreme gratitude, and blessed that I was a part of this year's St Tikhon's Summer Camp. After several months of monthly planning meetings to determine the camp theme (Word, Image, and Song), logo redesign, website redesign, digital/online registration, revised daily schedule, vetting and placing staff in positions according to skills, talents, and requests, and accepting the campers; camp began this year on July 2nd and ended on July 8th.

At camp we had a total of 51 staff and counselors (1 Chaplain, 8 Kitchen staff, & 42 counselors) serving 144 campers (135 overnight & 9 day) where all enjoyed an amazing week of learning, laughing, and most important prayer to the theme of Word, Image, and Song experiencing God's work and presence. Nearly 30% of our campers were first-time campers to St Tikhon's and almost 75% of the staff were first-timers to St Tikhon's as well. I marveled at the love and dedication shown by the staff members—many made great sacrifices to attend. Activities included Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, daily classroom religious education, swimming, canoeing, arts & crafts, volleyball, fishing & dancing. This year will still had room inspections where the dirtiest room received the opportunity to serve in the chow hall by cleaning up after the campers went to their next activity.

Although I have organized and headed many different organizations at times challenged with 800 personnel, this was the first time running a summer camp and I believe I learned, we learned, a lot. It was a joy to see so many people flourishing in a loving environment. The excitement and positive experience of this year's camp has many making plans to attend next year. It was extremely enjoyable to have His Eminence with us all week long. His experience and knowledge from his time running the Antiochian Summer Camp was/is invaluable.

In preparation for next year, we have already begun the process of our systems and processes. We had two after-action reviews (AAR) on camp and about this past camp season and hope to get a couple more in with the entire staff. Our first two were with the camp directors & chancery staff and the camp's medical staff along with the kitchen staff. The dedication, knowledge, and experience of our staff is remarkable. We spoke on many topics that in the planning process and execution that went according to plan and things that did not. For instance, we spoke about registration and had great input on how to improve registration with more staff assisting. In addition, ensuring campers knew their room assignment and room counselor before going up to the dorms. The

medical team would like to have access to the medical forms earlier in the process in order to allow them to plan and prepare better for the medical supplies needed. The kitchen staff asked the same thing in order to plan meals for those who have a restricted diet. What is even more amazing during these AARs was the goal to improve the camp for the Glory of God for our youth. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of you.” No one took the recommendations in the wrong way nor did any give recommendations condescendingly.

From the beginning of the vetting process to the dismissal of camp, the camp leadership sought to instill in our campers and staff that they, in and through our camp, all can experience the love, grace, and mercy of our Savior. Our staff did an outstanding job of teaching and conveying the principles of courage and gratitude, so vital in tackling the challenges of everyday life. This year’s camp environment was truly a mirror image of the love and dedication of the staff. The success of the camp was a direct result of our staff. Without dedicated Orthodox Christian Staff we simply could not do this. From Vladyka, to our chaplain, the medical staff, religious education directors, room and age group counselors, and the kitchen staff; camp would not have been camp without you. Thank you, all of you. There are too many to name but you silent heroes know who you are. I do want to thank Vladyka, Fr Silouan Burns, and Fr Vjekoslav Jovicic personally for the many hours over the past several months for your hard work and dedication. Thank you.

I have decided to step down, however, as camp director due to personal reasons. God, in His love for His children, sent someone who will pick up the mantle as camp director and continue with the guidance of His Eminence to do wonderful things for the youth of the diocese. Mr Dan Peck, of Archangel Michael, Wilmington, DE who was a camp counselor last year, has raised his hand to volunteer. He already has held one meeting this past week where one of the vital points of the meeting was “WE NEED MORE VOLUNTEERS!” so please go to your parishes and ask those members in good standing of your parish who have the skills for camp to volunteer. Dan is working on building a team and blessed to have Patrick O’Leary of Holy Apostles assisting with website changes to lighten the load and streamline the process.

His unworthy servant,

Fr Michael Shepherd