

Camp 23' Report and Reflections

Report

Camp 23 was a collaboration between six youth pastors and their churches in Northern Michigan: Faith Reformed Church, Bayview Church, Buckley Tabernacle, Manistee Tabernacle, Kensington Church, New Hope Church and West Side Community Church. The camp was hosted at Lost Valley Retreat Center in Gaylord. The purpose for the camp was to connect students in Northern Michigan from different churches but who may also go to the same school or are a part of the same communities so that they would have the shared bond of following Jesus. We wanted students to say, "Hey, I go to school with that person and had no idea they went to church or were a christian!". Christian community is stronger together and especially as these young people are having their identities formed.

The theme for camp was "On Purpose". The point of our theme was to get students to intentionally live oriented to Christ in all aspects of their life. Our Chapel speaker was Paul Eperson of Forge Speakers and our worship band was The Spark. We had three Chapels a day, one after each meal, where we would celebrate the teams who won competitions, celebrate individual students, worshiped and listened to our speaker preach the Gospel. After chapel, churches would either break out into their small groups to discuss the message and pray or campers would spend time in solitude to reflect and pray on their own.

Each youth pastor had a role and responsibilities essential to the function of camp but that were separate from their own personal responsibilities as a director of student ministries/ youth pastor. My Role was Morning Chapel Host and Hype Man for games. I also took on the role as "Team Pastor". As the Chapel host, I got students centered spiritually for the day ahead while also getting them excited for the activities that

would take place. I would be on the main stage while students entered the chapel after breakfast to welcome them in. I would actively engage them and get them excited so that their energy was up each morning. They were always tired coming in because of the previous day's events. I would also give a quick word from scripture to remind them of the previous chapels and prepare them for the coming day. During our games/competition sessions, campers were separated into two main groups: high school and middle school and then each group was further divided into four teams: Red, Yellow, Blue, Green. During these competitions, I made sure that teams energy levels stayed up and that games were exciting. As Team Pastor my role was to check on youth pastors, leaders and students physical, spiritual and emotional well being during the duration of camp. In general, I built relationships and created a sense of community amongst the camp. This was pretty easy to do since I was a familiar face every morning.

In total we had about 200 students and 30 leaders total for Camp 23' and we have already received interest from other churches in Northern Michigan to be a part of camp next year. We will be looking for a new facility to host camp for Camp 24' and we have already begun the process of planning for next summer.

Reflections

I feel like there were so many little moments that I could speak to and why they made this camp experience meaningful. If I had to put it all together to describe how it felt and what I'm hopeful for, I would say that it felt like a movement. A movement of students, and adults alike who are eager to follow Jesus. It felt like more than just a youth group camp. There were moments where the other pastors and I sat down at the end of the

day (Usually 2:00AM) and said, “Is this really happening?”. I can't emphasize this enough, but many of these pastors have been in ministry for 10+ years and walked away saying that this was the best camp experience they have ever been a part of. Not because of the facilities, the food, the games, the fun (though those things were good). It was chapel, worship, small group time and team building. It was the fact that students from different youth groups discovered that their fellow classmates came to camp either following Jesus or desiring to follow Jesus. It was knowing that there was a common bond and passion amongst us as youth pastors: To declare the reality of Jesus together.

Students described this camp as “more real”. They've been to many camps but something about this camp was impactful for them. Leaders talked about how this camp helped them realize how much more they want to be a part of God's purposes in students' lives and in general! They shared that they really just came to camp to support students and left realizing that God was also calling them. Students who are usually more reserved opened up, desiring to follow Jesus and know Him . Students from all churches who have come to youth group every week and have heard the gospel many times finally GOT IT at camp. My leaders were all in from the very beginning and even the ones who couldn't make it to camp made sure they were supportive from afar. On Purpose was the theme but the passion of God's Spirit was what overwhelmed the camp.

In the week following camp, I have had countless encounters with adults in the community who have heard about camp from their church, students or friends. I spent time at the Northwestern Michigan Fair and ran into students from other churches and who remembered me and talked about camp and how they're doing since camp. My wife, leaders and the other youth pastors have all shared their encounters. This was a true

community wide event and I am hopeful that what comes of it is closer student and leader christian fellowship across Grand Traverse.

To my leaders, Andy Terrell, Olivia Conner and Cheyanne Fowler and their families. You guys make youth ministry awesome and exciting. Your work means more than I could ever express and you are a blessing to me. Thank you for giving me your all and for letting me witness your giftings in the Lord!

Tremendous purpose and great joy. All found in and pouring out of the salvation of our Lord, Jesus Christ.