

Camp Bethel Director's report to the 2021 Virginia District Conference

“Grit and Grace.”

Camp Bethel remains viable so far in 2021 through **GRIT**: the dedication, resilience, and creativity of our staff and volunteers. Camp Bethel remains viable so far in 2021 through **GRACE**: God's ever-present love coupled with hundreds of donations, memorials, and sponsorships from individuals, families, congregations, and groups. Thank you for the love and support you provide to camp's mission, “Together with God, each other, and creation.” We retained staff, we safely reopened for rentals and events, and we held safe and fun Summer Camps in 2021. Uncertainty will persist as this pandemic endures, so we continue to rely on your gifts and donations.

“Unprecedented” is overused yet accurately describes our experience. When there is risk in simply gathering together (for summer camps, retreats, meals, events, fundraisers), how do we respond? Necessity is truly the mother of invention.

Adapted plans for 2021 Summer Camps changed, changed again, *and changed again* as we waited for guidance and finally permission from Virginia and the Health Department. We planned a reduced schedule with reduced cabin capacity, and we implemented multiple health and safety protocols. Though particularly challenging, Summer Camps were a **BIG SUCCESS**: safe, fun, and Spirit-filled with 554 campers over 7 weeks, which was 92% of our planned-reduction capacity. (In “normal” summers, we serve between 1,000-1,200 campers.) Campers and Staff remained COVID-free before, during, and after camps, with only four symptomatic scares that resulted in negative tests. We granted Camperships to 40 campers totaling \$12,280, and 87 campers received congregational Good-As-Gold funding totaling \$23,813.50. Plans for 2022 Camps are at CampBethelVirginia.org/camps.

Our reduced 2021 Camper numbers were planned, but fortunately matched our UNplanned reduced Summer Staff numbers. Like all other camps and summer employers in Virginia, we struggled to find enough Summer Staff. We decided to raise weekly pay for Counselors and Kitchen Staff, we increased recruitment bonuses, and we implemented a “Summer Staff Adoption” program. Through these efforts, we fully staffed our Ark Kitchen, and we hired 29 (just enough) Counselors and Coordinators. (In “normal” summers, we hire between 45-70 summer staff.) The “Summer Staff Adoption” program was a tremendous success, and the adopting congregations and their adopted staff were mutually blessed by these new relationships. Our staff performed at a higher level, in part, due to the adoption program. Thank you to Daleville CoB, Germantown Brick CoB, Mount Hermon CoB, Peters Creek CoB, Trinity CoB, and several families and individuals. The Staff Adoption program and our Summer Offering project for Staff Scholarships provided our Counselors and Coordinators a \$325 end-of-summer bonus for completing their contract! Our ability to declare this in the future will be an extremely valuable recruitment tool. Please encourage the industrious and resilient older teens and young adults you know to apply for Summer Staff (CampBethelVirginia.org/staff).

In place of our December 2020 Christmas Together Banquet, we baked and sold Christmas Desserts to 91 families (a total of 2,596 dessert pieces) and raised \$3,490. Our 2021 Camp Rep Meeting was a well-attended Zoom call. Our 2021 Sounds of the Mountains Storytelling Festival (SoundsoftheMountains.org) was once again online, free, and featured 6 performers and 44 story videos that garnered 6,405 views. 81 families and 18 sponsors donated \$32,536. In place of our 2021 Sow the Seed Scholarship Banquet, we baked and sold Mother's Day Desserts to 21 families (a total of 58 boxes) and raised \$1,205. Supporters purchased \$3,755 worth of needed camp supplies from our Amazon Wish List (<https://a.co/5qG5JYq>).

Our 5th annual “Camp Bethel PEP!” 5K on September 4 was held in person with health and safety protocols (CampBethelVirginia.org/5K). It was another successful 5K with 104 participants ages 1-80, 10 volunteers, and 5 sponsors (including Oak Grove Church of the Brethren as a title sponsor), raising \$24,068. Our 27th annual Camp Bethel Benefit Golf Tournament was rescheduled to October 6 due to heavy rain on September 22, and it was another successful event with 110 golfers and 35 sponsors raising \$17,000 (CampBethelVirginia.org/golf). Due to the continuing concerns about COVID-19, we once again did not hold an “in-person” Heritage Day Festival on October 2. Several congregations adapted and held individual offerings, fundraisers, meals, and food/craft sales in honor of Heritage Day. Please participate with an event or offering before the end of 2021 in support of Heritage Day (CampBethelVirginia.org/HeritageDay).

The Bandage Box Cottage was rebuilt and repurposed with a beautiful new deck thanks to Cedar Bluff Church of the Brethren, several volunteers, and our Maintenance team. Our new Adventure Village platform huts and dining shelter is 95% complete thanks to Mount Hermon Church of the Brethren, the Virlina Disaster Response Committee, several volunteers, and our Maintenance team. New beds and mattresses are in place for Daleville Cabin, Pineview A-Frame, and Bandage Box. Spring Workday Volunteers assembled 24 box fan air-filters for improved ventilation in all sleeping facilities. Work continues to repair and replace old boards on the Ark Deck and bridges and decks throughout campus. Mickey and his team did an excellent job keeping up with summer maintenance, mowing, and repairs.

We remain excited for the next step in our long-planned RV Village, even though the pandemic has slowed the process. We have approval from Botetourt County and initial funding provided by gifts to the “Seed, Scattered and Sown” campaign, so we seek proposals for construction. Plans include water, electric, sewer, picnic table, campfire ring, and parking space for cars. Updated site layout and images are at www.VirlinaFuture.org. The pandemic has also slowed finalization of our planned Disc Golf Course along the fields and forests of our southern property. Watch CampBethelVirginia.org/discgolf for updates and Hole Sponsorship opportunities.

Despite continued cancellations and rescheduling, our Guest Group Reservations are beginning to rebound. By comparison, in 2019, of 301 group reservations, only 38 cancelled. In 2020, of 353 group reservations, 182 cancelled. In 2021, of 258 group reservations, only 70 have cancelled. With God's help plus community common-sense, we can suppress the virus and hopefully return to "normal" soon. Camp Bethel is open for use! Cyclists, hikers, walkers, and day-visitors are welcome on weekends; hiking and biking trail maps are on our office porch. Visit CampBethelVirginia.org/groups for information and prices, including significant Virlina group discounts.

Be certain that your congregation is represented at the Camp Supporter Luncheon on Saturday, February 12, 2022, 12:00-3:00 (CampBethelVirginia.org/Rep). At least ONE person from your congregation should attend. After a free lunch in the Ark, we will share and distribute all the tools and information you need to communicate Camp Bethel to your home congregations.

This annual written report is only a glimpse into this complex, exciting, challenging, and joyful year at Camp Bethel. Every day is a unique episode with real-life complicated and wonderful characters. We are privileged to be in ministry with hundreds of summer campers and their families plus thousands of guests, visitors, students, volunteers, and Virlina District members. Our ongoing success at Camp Bethel requires an immense amount of work and time. We're thankful for the excellent leadership of Naomi Powers who is completing six years and two terms on the Outdoor Ministries Committee, most recently as our Chair.

Our staff have shown grit and grace during these challenging times. We are truly blessed with an excellent management team at Camp Bethel, including **Jenna Stacy Mehalso** (Program Coordinator), **Mickey Nichols** (Facilities Manager), **Daniel Naff** (Food Services Coordinator), and **Spencer Knox** (Resident Intern). **David Flora**, **George Shockley**, and **Christian Sullivan** are our part-time Maintenance Assistants, **Beth Wiegandt** is our part-time Outdoor Educator, and **Melissa Browning** is our part-time Housekeeper.

We are thankful to have kept Food Services Coordinator, **Wesley Shrader** for three years of excellent service to Camp Bethel, who departed his role on August 31. **Daniel Naff** (Cloverdale CoB) began on October 20 as our new Food Services Coordinator. Daniel is a 2020 graduate of Bridgewater College, he has served for several years on our summer camp staff, and he brings a wealth of experience and a love for cooking to his new role. He writes, “Camp Bethel is, without exaggeration, my favorite place on earth.” Welcome, Daniel! We are also thankful for eight years of devoted leadership from Program Coordinator, **Jenna Stacy Mehalso**, who will depart her role on December 31. Jenna writes, “As my husband and I think about the next steps for our lives, I need to move into a more ‘normal’ work schedule. I'm sad to move out of camp ministry, but I will continue to be involved with Camp Bethel as a dedicated volunteer.” The Camp Director and Outdoor Ministries Committee are working to fill the Program Coordinator position. You are invited to a reception celebrating Wes' and Jenna's service and to welcome Daniel on Friday, January 7, 6:00-7:00pm in the Ark (or possibly the Gym, COVID conditions pending). Cards and gifts are encouraged.

We are inspired and blessed by generous donations and sponsorships from hundreds of individuals and families. We still need your gifts and your advocacy to help Camp Bethel remain viable through 2021 and into 2022. Please give and encourage others to give, and see our Wish List at CampBethelVirginia.org/donate.

We know that you, too, have been impacted by COVID-19, so thank you, Virginia District congregations, for graciously supporting Camp Bethel. We are adapting and responding in responsible and creative ways. We continue to foster and build relationships together with God, each other, and creation. Your continued advocacy is a great blessing to everyone in our Camp Bethel community! As we strive for continued excellence, please encourage your congregation to increase volunteerism and participation at Camp Bethel. Pray for the staff, the Virginia District Board and the Outdoor Ministries Committee, and all our campers, volunteers, and supporters as we joyfully continue the work of Jesus, *together*.

TOGETHER, in Christ our hope,

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January 7, 2022, 6:00-7:00pm: Farewell Reception for Jenna and Wes, and Welcome Daniel.
January 8-9, 2022: Winter Camp Youth & Kids' Retreat.
January 10, 2022: Summer Camp 2022 Registration OPENS.
February 12, 2022 (Sat), 12:00noon: Camp Supporter Lunch, RSVP.
March 10, 2022 (Thurs), 6:30pm: Sow the Seed Banquet, RSVP.
April 2, 2022 (Sat), 7:30am Spring Volunteer, RSVP free meals.
April 8-9, 2022: Sounds of the Mountains Storytelling Festival at Camp Bethel.
May 27-30, 2022: Memorial Day Family Weekend, RSVP meals.
May 28, 2022 (Sat), Family Day/Summer Camp Open House, 1:00-4:00pm.
May 30-June 10, 2022: Summer Staff Training.
June 4, 2022 (Sat): Parent-Child Day Camp.
June 10, 2022 (Fri) 5:30pm: Summer Staff Commissioning Dinner.
June 12-July 29, 2022: Summer Camps & Family Adventures.
July 24-August 13, 2022: Guest Camps & Band Camps.
September 2-5, 2022: Labor Day Family Weekend, RSVP meals.
September 3, 2022 (Sat): Camp Bethel PEP! 5K.
September 21, 2022 (Wed): 28th Benefit Golf Tournament.
October 1, 2022 (Sat): 38th annual Heritage Day Festival.
October 14-16, 2022: Camp Bethel at Roanoke GO Outside Festival.
October 24, 2022 (Mon): Crisis Management Workshop at Camp Bethel.
November 5, 2022 (Sat), 7:30am: Fall Volunteer Workday, RSVP free meals.
November 11-12, 2022: Virginia District Conference, location TBD.
December 8, 2022 (Thu): Christmas TOGETHER Banquet.
January 7-8, 2022: Winter Camp Youth & Kids' Retreat.