

## Anabaptist Inspired Spiritual Formation at the Youth Farm Bible Camp

What is Anabaptist Theology and how does it impact spiritual formation at a Bible Camp? This is a question that is not easy to answer. The term Anabaptist means something different depending on which group uses the term. For some, it means a commitment to adult baptism, refers to the radical reformation of the sixteenth century and has its roots in the Mennonite people. For others, the non-violent beliefs of the early Mennonites are the most important part of the Anabaptist faith. Many theological academics would say that there is not a well written theology of anabaptists, but instead the historic systematic theology of orthodox Christianity is the foundation with anabaptist essentials such as Christ-centric, adult baptism, love for enemies, priesthood of all believers, service to others added. The confession of faith in a Mennonite perspective would agree with this assessment. The confession is very similar to any evangelical denomination, just comes from an anabaptist perspective. Others would say that the anabaptist perspective is baked into every component of one's theology or understanding of God.

The mission statement of the Youth Farm Bible Camp has been the same since the early 1940s. It is to "Share Jesus with People and Provide a Place to Serve". The core values of our organization are Sacrifice, Seek, Share and Serve. We feel that God calls us to sacrifice our own wills, die to self and live in Christ. This allows for community living to thrive, and then be messy when the brokenness of humanity enters the situation. Together we seek a deeper relationship to Father, Son and Spirit, desiring to have community with our Triune Lord. We share resources with one another – time, money, and prayers; to walk with God in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. We share Jesus by being the salt and the light. Our saltiness is our testimony, our words, our worshipping God for all to see. Our light is our actions, our character, our lives, breathed out in this world to confirm our testimony. We serve the world, we serve the church, we serve our campers, we serve our corn maze participants, we serve our retreaters, we serve our donors, we provide a place to serve. We care about serving others.

The character of our committed, year-round staff, impact our summer staff and allow for discipleship to happen. We seek to nurture the faith of our cabin leaders, who in turn will nurture the faith of the junior cabin leaders and campers in the cabin. We are moving towards having more of our cabin staff join us on year-round internships so that the training and living in Christ happens more organically. We pray together daily, sharing each other's burdens and lifting up families, campers, retreaters, and everything that we do at our organization. Community living, Christ-centered theology, loving our enemies, serving the body and the world, resting well, eliminating the hurriedness from life, worshipping our triune God, discipling all staff and campers, inviting all to enter the abundant life God has for everyone, is what we seek to do and comes from our anabaptist heritage.

The gospel is presented at camp and to our staff. The good news that Jesus is King, and we can serve our king. The death and resurrection of Christ is a very important part of the gospel story, but it is not the whole story. First and foremost, we are to give our allegiance to our King and serve the Kingdom of God. This is not just a quick prayer at the altar, but a way to live our

whole life. Transformation can start with a prayer, but often it is something that comes through years of relationship to our Lord and Saviour. We seek to invite people, to share with others that Jesus gets us. He understands the pains of humanity. He is willing to forgive us of our sins if we just confess our sins.

Anabaptist spirituality centres on yielding to God and yielding to community. In Arnold Snyder's book *Following the Footsteps of Christ* he gives a historical overview of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, and the belief of yielding ones will to the will of God. In Paul's letters to the early Christian churches, we see this in the phrase *die to self and live in Christ*. *Gelassenheit* is the High German term used to describe this spiritual discipline. Humbly living for Christ and others, living out the calling each Christian has, to follow the two greatest commandments listed by Jesus, Love God, Love People. This has been the motto for the Youth Farm Bible Camp for over fifteen years. Our spiritual formation plan is to invite staff, campers, donors, board members, supporters, and anyone that comes onto our yard, to live out loving God and loving people. This requires sacrifice, serving, sharing, and seeking.

Practical ways that this happens at camp is through curriculum developed with the goal to invite campers and guests to Love God and Love People. We also recognize that Jesus is our King and requires our allegiance to him. We humbly serve the needs of one another in our camp community, we have fun together and play games to strengthen community. We live life together, worshiping in morning and evening, memorize scripture, eat wholesome food, care for animals and God's creation, study the Bible in small groups and larger ones, and just be with one another recognizing God's presence. We have started having a prayer service in our hay loft at the end of the camp week to pray for everyone. It has been a touching and moving time where people are organically invited into a deeper relationship with God. Like the early church and the early anabaptists, we seek that faith in God is caught, or is contagious, through the working of Holy Spirit, and not through any type of coercion or pressuring. We recognize that God is much bigger than our camp and we are just one of many places sowing seeds into the lives of people.