

Episcopal Day Camp 2008

Every July, a transformation takes place at the St. Columba Conference Center. Usually a place of serene contemplation and prayerful reflection, the grounds of our diocesan conference center become a noisy, mud-smeared milieu of youthful exertion and joyful expression. Episcopal Day Camp (EDC) takes over for three weeks, and the place veritably vibrates with the energy of children and young people who look forward every year to this opportunity to heed the call of the wild.

Participants range in age from those just entering first grade to college graduates. They break out as follows:

- Rising 1st – 6th graders are *Campers*
- Rising 7th – 8th graders are *Junior Counselors in Training*
- Rising 9th – 10th graders are *Junior Counselors*
- Rising 11th – 12th graders are *Senior Counselors*
- High School Graduates and older are *Adult Counselors*

Campers and counselors are drawn from a wide variety of faith and socio-economic backgrounds, with the majority coming from within The Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee. Running concurrently with the regular day camp is an overnight camp for children from poor and disadvantaged neighborhoods in the Memphis area. Camp St. Columba, as the overnight camp is called, gives these children an opportunity to attend the day camp alongside the day participants, as well as the added fun and enrichment of an overnight experience with a nurturing and caring staff. A new group of 12 to 15 campers attends overnight camp each of the three weeks of EDC. This program has been in operation for six years, and many of the original participants have been able to return as counselors, initiating a whole new level of modeling and mentorship for the younger campers.

Deep and lasting friendships are made among campers and counselors alike; friendships that transcend camp and build bridges. In a given week of EDC, there are as many as 250 children and young-people making a joyful noise in and around Gates Pavilion. In a few instances, the counselors have actually outnumbered the campers. Not only does this allow for a really good ratio of supervision, it also speaks to the depth of loyalty that is fostered within the campers, for each other and the institution of EDC itself, that prompts so many to return again and again as counselors. Additionally, the inter-parish relationships among young-people have helped knit together a strong diocesan youth community that really enjoys serving and worshipping together.

Episcopal Day Camp is a ministry for *both* camper and counselor. All who attend are afforded an opportunity to experience Jesus Christ as He is made known in both nature and community. EDC is messy, loud, smelly, gooey, financially unprofitable, and **GLORIOUS!!!**