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Family Camp: A Place to Rest, Reflect and Renew

Summer. Time to relax, slow down, reconnect with family and friends, and revel in the all-too-brief warm weather. Also a season to reflect on the past year and plan for the new one. We enjoy all these things at our annual Family Camp

05/21/2023

Every August, we get into our trusty old van and drive to aretreat center

in Quebec, where we spend a delightful week in fun and fellowship with several other families.

I believe that the original vision of Family Camp was to offer families an affordable vacation getaway with other families who share the same Catholic vision. We pay a flat fee for an all-inclusive week which includes a cabin for each family and cooked meals. That's right – cooked meals! This makes it a true holiday for the moms.

Of course, Family Camp is so much more than delicious meals. The week offers a combination of structured and unstructured activities, all aimed at relaxation, recreation and renewal. There are early morning runs; parent discussions; water sports at the beautiful lake; moms' and dads' nights out; a nightly campfire; soccer matches; a pinata party and an epic water balloon

fight. While not luxurious, Family Camp feels like a mini paradise.

Here are more reasons why we love Family Camp so much:

Spiritual renewal

Spiritual renewal is a vital component of Family Camp. We are blessed to have access to a chapel at any time. We also invite a priest to spend the week with us, so we enjoy daily Mass, Confession, and Adoration. We pray the Rosary by the campfire and we encourage the children to offer intentions and lead a decade. This is followed by an examination of conscience. Through these acts of faith, our children witness how our faith can and should influence all areas of our lives, including leisure time.

Time to unplug

Given that most of us live crazy busy, hectic lives, getting away provides a much needed reset. Here we truly unplug. No electronics are allowed for the kids and phone use is kept to a minimum for the adults. The fact that cell reception is terrible is an attractive feature. “Going dark” for a week allows us to reset our systems and practice the act of *being present*.

Parent-to-parent encouragement

We spend quality time with like-minded friends, old and new. We learn and support each other in our vocation as spouses and parents. Every morning, the parents gather for an informal discussion about a chosen topic. Past topics have included marriage (always a must), work/life balance, finances, education, faith, leisure time,

toddlers and teenagers, current events, sex ed, in-laws, etc. We love that we can share our experiences, ask our burning questions and take comfort in the knowledge that we are not alone.

Living in community

Everyone helps with chores and the running of activities. Just like at home, there is serving, cleaning, and laundry to be done. After every meal, families take turns cleaning up – clearing tables, washing and drying dishes, and sweeping floors. Washing dishes is my favorite chore, as we get to chat with our fellow washers. It almost makes me want to get rid of my dishwasher to replicate the experience at home. Almost.

Family camp is a wonderful opportunity to offer our time, efforts and talents for the good of others. Children see the good examples

around them and rise to the occasion. I just love seeing the older kids care for and play with the younger kids. Over the years we have seen those younger kids grow up and care for the next generation of little ones. It is a sight to warm the heart.

Kids are free to be kids

We have been going to Family Camp since our oldest boys were 4 and 2 years old. Now they are 16 and 14 and they have so many friends at camp. Now three more children have joined in the fray. They all enjoy a freedom that they never get anywhere else. Given that there are approximately 60 children at camp in any given year, it's unbelievable how little misbehavior is witnessed. Something that we have come to realize now that we have a wide spread in ages (2 to 16yrs), is how challenging it is to find an activity

that everyone enjoys. Well, Family Camp is definitely it. Fresh air, good food and friends; the perfect recipe for happy kids (and parents!).

But don't take my word for it; when I asked my family what they loved most about Family Camp, here's what they said:

"I love the lack of parental supervision and the minimal structure." 16-yr-old son

"I love the friends and the slingshot competition." 14-yr-old son

"I love having good friends to play with." 9-yr-old son

"I love the piñata party and the chocolate cake that I get for my birthday!" 7-yr-old daughter

"The adult conversations are the best." Husband of unspecified age

Time to reflect on our family vision

For us, Family Camp allows us to reaffirm our mission as a Christian family. In the daily craziness, it's often hard to see the forest for the trees. Once a year, we get to step back, take stock of where we're at, and recommit to our lives – our spouses, our children, and our community. After camp we always have one or two (small) resolutions to implement in the coming year. Past resolutions have included making time for personal prayer and family prayer, taking specific steps to address a particular issue, and being more intentional with our time as a couple and as a family.

Melissa AtLee

Faith, family and friends. This is the essence of life, and it all comes together at Family Camp.

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