

08/08/2023

106 Children gather for our annual Camp Saint Sophrony



With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas, Camp Saint Sophrony – the Archdiocese Summer Youth Camp – took place last week from 22 July to 28 July.

Some 106 children and 42 volunteers and clergy gathered for a fun-filled week in Dartmoor National Park in Devon at the Heatree Activity Centre. The theme of Camp 2023 was “the light of the world” from Christ’s teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

The camp started with a blessing by His Grace Bishop Raphael of Ilion, who came from Edinburgh and spent three days with the youngsters.

The children had a fantastic time and went home safe and happy: Mrs Marianna Digka, mother of four campers, said, “Our kids returned home overflowing with joy.”

The children engaged in many activities: from the adventurous (climbing, kayaking, bushcraft, bivouacking) to the quiet and contemplative (wood carving, komboskini making, icon painting, prosphora baking). One of the week's highlights was Camp Olympics. The camp competed in houses: Eagles, Lions, Angels and Oxen. The contests included tug o' war, Scottish wrestling, Mandili, and pass the bucket.

A volunteer team worked round the clock, with energy, sacrifice, and selfless love. By day, they kept the children entertained, safe and well-fed. Their work stopped only when the children were tucked up in bed. Despite the hard work, the leaders came away elated; Theo Andreou said, "It was the best thing I have done in my life." Sam and Nick Langton, Kyriacos Theophilou and Konstantina Maragkou and Owain Williams were stars of the leader team. They led the lower middle and senior camps, respectively, with outstanding organisational skill and love.

Each day began and ended with prayer. His Grace Bishop Raphael celebrated the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, 23 July, and the feast of St Panteleimon on 27 July was honoured with an early morning Divine Liturgy and artoklasia. The younger campers had informal lesson time discussing the camp theme in the mornings. The teenagers sat around the evening campfires with the clergy and Essex monastery sisters, asking challenging questions. At bedtime, the leaders told stories of the lives of the saints or read to them from Holy Scripture.

Fr Panteleimon Maxfield, the Priest in Charge of Camp, said, "The main purpose of Camp Saint Sophrony is for the children to have fun and meet friends within an Orthodox Christian environment."

The Archdiocese hopes that, through the friendships made at Camp Saint Sophrony, the children will grow in confidence in their Orthodox Christian faith. One boy said, "I connect more deeply and meaningfully with the friends I made at camp than any others because they understand me." The whole camp danced Greek and Scottish traditional dances on the last night. As they said goodbye the next day, there were feelings of joy over the new friendships made and sadness over parting.

The campers came from across the Archdiocese. Some 22 different churches sent children to the camp, and many supported their children financially to attend. Fr David Somalis from Saint Haralambos, Luton, said: "A Christian camp has as the centre of its entire programme the joy that springs from faith in Christ. Here at Saint Haralambos, we know that supporting our children to attend the camp is an investment in the future of our community."

The Church of the Holy Trinity and Saint Luke was another church that helped

children to attend by providing bursaries. The community sent ten youngsters this year and organised a coach from the Midlands to take 40 children and leaders down to Devon.

Fr Nicholas Karafillides, an assistant priest at St Luke's, joined the camp for the first time and was seen playing rounders, football and table tennis with the kids. Asked about the importance of Camp Saint Sophrony, he simply said, "It's massive".

There was a strong contingent from the north of the UK again this year, including Deacon Symeon Menne from St Anthony's Newcastle. He literally threw himself into all the activities. Many enjoyed the moment when he leaped aboard a raft for a race across a lake, only to plunge into the water with cassock billowing.

Three Sisters from the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist joined the camp: Sisters Magdalen, Theodora and Cassiani. They had a wonderful way with the children.

Protopresbyter Theodoros Polyviou, who joined the camp for the second time this year, said the sisters' role was vital. "It was a joy to have them on the camp. They were very supportive." The nuns helped with teaching, arts and crafts, prosphora baking, chanting in the chapel as well as children's activities.

The camp was helped by the generous gifts from many quarters. The Archdiocese gave a substantial bursary for every child. Heatree Activity Centre provided a 30% discount off the normal cost of accommodation and activities.

Chris Butcher and Protopresbyter Theodoros Polyviou raised funds, negotiated knock-down food prices and managed the kitchen for the camp. The communities of Battersea, Coventry, Birmingham St Luke's, Birmingham St Andrews, Edinburgh, Luton, Bath, Shrewsbury, Edmonton, Kentish Town and the David Chilcott Fund supported the camp with bursaries and donations. Father Ioan Petkov, Chester, and Paul Bristow Associates Ltd provided 200 printed t-shirts free of charge. Kouzina, TCR, Theos, Bidfood, Chicken Joes, Kingfry and Kipro bisti made gifts of food. Timotheos Godbold supplied a substantial amount of food from Tesco's free of charge. Eleni Vulliamy provided three large watermelons. And last but by no means least, Fr Panteleimon Maxfield, Presvytera Panayiota Maxfield and Alexia Papalexandrakou gave hundreds of hours of time during the year to preparing for a successful camp.

The planning for Camp Saint Sophrony 2024 has already begun!

Please follow the link below if you would like to contribute to the Camp Saint Sophrony Bursary Fund. Only 60% of the cost of the camp is covered by fees

charged to parents. The camp relies on giving by organisations and individuals to make up the difference to keep camp affordable for families.

saintsophronyscamp.churchsuite.com/donate/fund/exrnsjlh



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