

The New Group

Guide

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Frequently Asked Questions

What am I getting into?

You are getting yourself into an incredible experience of serving others and experiencing Christian community. Monday through Friday you will go out with a small team of people to complete minor home repair projects (Service Project) or to build relationships with children through a day camp (Day Camp). We mix up all the churches that come and as a result the community builds quickly. One of the most unique characteristics of a Mountain T.O.P. camp is this deep sense of a community.

What is provided in the cost?

- Lodging in cabins with bunks
- Meals from Sunday lunch through Saturday breakfast are provided
- Materials and project coordination
- Some tools for Service Project (see Tool Requirements)
- All programming, including nightly worship
- Camp staffing

What is the difference between Service Project and Day Camp?

The main difference between Service Project and Day Camp is the “work” that you do during the day. Service Project does minor home repair projects at multiple sites. Day Camp facilitates activities focused on varied experiences for local children (ages 6-11). SP and DC happen concurrently: they stay at the same camp, do the same morning and evening activities. There are also different Vehicle Requirements.

Can my group do both Day Camp and Service Project?

Yes. Your entire group will stay at the same camp. The trick is to have the appropriate number of adults and vehicles for the youth who want to participate in each program.

What is the size of a camp community?

Usually anywhere from 100-150 people, with about 5-8 different church groups.

How long is a workday?

A workday is from 9AM – 4:30PM

Do you eat lunch at the site?

Yes, when the groups gather their tools in the morning before leaving, they will also pick up a food and water cooler. Service Project YRGs (Youth Renewal Groups) will eat lunch at the family’s house and invite them to join in for food and/or conversation. Day Camp YRGs will eat at various sites throughout the week, depending on their activities.

How old does a participant have to be?

He or she must have finished the 7th grade or be at least 13 years old.

Why is there an age requirement to be a participant?

The type of work being done requires a certain level of maturity and physical stamina.

The YRG is comprised mostly of youth that are empowered to take ownership in the work, activities and direction of the team. A certain level of physical and emotional maturity is necessary to help these teams function in the most effective way possible. The experience as a whole is best understood at this age.

Where exactly will we be going?

Mountain T.O.P. serves 7 counties in Tennessee out of two camp facilities in middle Tennessee. Camp Baker Mountain is in Spencer, TN and Camp Cumberland Pines is in Altamont, TN. Day Camp is run out of Camp Cumberland Pines and serves mainly children from Grundy County.

What are the accommodations like?

The camps are in wooded areas on top of the Cumberland Plateau. There is a dining hall, pavilion, cabins, worship center, tool shed, infirmary room, snack shop, basketball court, sand volleyball court and grassy field. The cabins have wooden bunks with foam mattresses. Participants bring their own bedding. Some of our cabins have bathrooms inside and some are in bathhouses a short distance from the cabin. There are no private rooms or married housing; men and women sleep in separate areas.

Who provides the tools for service project and the materials for day camp?

Each youth group participating in Service Project will be asked to bring Van Buckets. The appropriate amount of tools/materials prorated by the group's vehicle requirements. It is critical that groups understand that the Van Buckets are essential to a successful camp week. For Service Project, the materials (lumber, paint, nails, etc.) will already be at your project site.

Day Camp's materials vary from year to year. Typically, we ask that you bring basic craft supplies along with a "van bucket" of "tools" to help with activities for the children. Closer to you camp week, a MTOP staff member will be in touch with you about these requirements.

Can I come late on Sunday or leave early if I have other plans?

Arriving late or leaving early from the camp week is NOT an option. Leaving at any time during the week and coming back to camp is also NOT AN OPTION. We design our program very carefully to ensure that all participants receive the maximum benefit from their experience. On Sunday our staffs will be breaking the community into work teams and on Saturday morning the community will have its final closure experience; missing either of these would hinder the experience for a person and the community. If there is an extreme situation, we are willing to address special cases.

What do we do at night?

The evenings are designed to promote community development within the camp. All youth and adults are expected to participate in the structured activities each night. There will be a time for community fun and recreation, community sharing, worship and some free time. These activities will be with the whole camp community and focus on the "whole" rather than individual groups.

Will we be able to have meetings to process as a group during the week?

Because of the way we mix up and build community throughout the week, we prefer if you do not hold any meetings exclusive to your youth group. We recognize that it is very important for you to be able build relationships with the youth based on your experiences together. We have provided a resource to you for debriefing the experience as a group that many groups have found to fit perfect as a break when traveling home. Of course, if an emergency comes up and you need to communicate to all of your youth, we will work with you to make time in the schedule for this. Please ask us if you have any questions.

What do the adults do?

The program is designed so that all campers, youth and adults, will participate in 100% of the camp activities. The role of the adults at camp is one of support and partnership with the staff. The camp director will be responsible for behavioral situations and will need the adults to act as role models of appropriate behavior. Many adults will serve as drivers to the various work projects and day camp sites. Within the work team, YRG, the adult serves as a team player, encouraging the youth to develop their leadership and relationship building skills. The adult brings a level of maturity to the YRG that Mountain T.O.P. and the people of the Cumberland Mountains appreciate and expect.

Mountain T.O.P. History

Mountain T.O.P. began in 1975 when a youth group from Nashville decided to put their “faith into action” by doing service projects for people who expressed needs in the Cumberland Mountains. There are now nearly 2000 youth and adults doing the same thing as they come to serve with Mountain T.O.P. during the spring, summer, and fall months through a variety of programs. In late 2005 early 2006, Mountain T.O.P. made a major move to the mountain. Administrative offices had been housed in Nashville for a number of years and under new leadership it was determined that we needed to reconnect with the community we serve. The administrative offices and full time support staff are all now housed in the service area. We have already begun reaping the benefits of making closer connections to the local businesses and are blessed to see the difference this ministry is making on a daily basis.

Youth Summer Ministry (YSM)

Over thirty years later we have extended our service into 13 counties. Over 1,800 families are served through our summer service project ministry. We have also introduced children’s Day Camp programs to provide a positive environment for local pre-teens during the summer months. A generous grant was awarded to Mountain T.O.P. in 2007 that literally paved the way for our children’s programs to make a come back after being absent for a couple of years. The grant allowed us to alleviate our churches of the responsibility of providing transportation for the children we serve. It has been a huge blessing and will hopefully serve as a catalyst to get the children’s programs up and running strong. We have about 100 churches participate each year representing about 13 different denominations

Adults In Ministry (AIM)

In 1990, A.I.M. evolved from the needs found in the Youth Summer Ministry. Through Service Project, Mountain T.O.P. discovered people wanted and needed major home repairs that required adult maturity and skill and through the Day camp found that the graduating Day Camp children still wanted to be a part of the summer Mountain T.O.P. experience. Therefore, God nudged us to explore ministering with and to teenagers of the Cumberland Mountains.

In 1995, Mountain T.O.P. began a new opportunity for local special needs children called Kaleidoscope. Kaleidoscope is a visual and performing arts camp for under-served, special needs children in Grundy County. We feel extremely blessed to serve as an instrument for the arts in this area. Kaleidoscope Camp opens up new doors for ministry as we seek to serve the special needs population. We see a great future for the arts and Mountain T.O.P. and look forward to continuing as a catalyst for the arts in this region.

Due to the large need in the Cumberland Mountains for major home repair, we have found

another window of opportunity to continue our service. This window is in the fall months, offering long weekends for adults to come do Major Home Repair projects in an effort to continue improving the living conditions for families before winter comes.

As part of the continuing growth and outreach, A.I.M. partnered with USDA Rural Housing Development between 1998 and 2003 to help families on the mountain with the costs of improving their living conditions. It was a special and mutually beneficial relationship for all involved. In 2006 Mountain T.O.P. rekindled this relationship and is again utilizing the USDA to provide funding for the Major Home Repair projects that we do. It continues to be a very mutually beneficial relationship as volunteer labor is free and all monies granted or loaned to families can be used towards materials.

In the summer of 2000, Camp Baker Mountain, in Van Buren County, was opened. This camp was built through the love and efforts of many A.I.M. participants and others. This was the first camp ever built specifically for Mountain T.O.P., and it stands as a hallmark achievement for the organization. In the early part of 2002, plans were formulated for the construction of a new cabin at Camp Cumberland Pines, in Grundy County. During the A.I.M. Friends Weekend of 2003, volunteers from 12 states came together and raised the walls on the new cabin. This structure was ready for use by the third weekend of our fall ministry. These same friends in recent years have made significant improvements to the facilities at Cumberland Pines. In 2005 the Peabody Building was remodeled to provide more adequate winterized facilities, and in 2006 the first floor of the lodge was remodeled with the help of some BreakOut groups so it could house our administrative office. Dinning hall improvements and improvements to the upstairs of the lodge in 2007 are going to afford a much better camper and staff experience. Today, Cumberland Pines can provide winterized facilities for nearly 100 campers, this opens up the doors for many off-season retreats.

The Mountain T.O.P. A.I.M. vision continues to expand with God's guidance. Please continue praying for the adult ministry as it strives to express God's love in action to all involved

History of BREAK OUT

College students first began coming to “the mountain” in 1987. The college ministry started off as an opportunity for students to serve by helping Mountain T.O.P. prepare its camp facilities with maintenance and repair projects in order to operate them during the upcoming summer months. The events grew to include outreach opportunities in the Cumberland Mountains by helping nonprofit agencies and local churches with needed maintenance, repair, construction projects, and any possible program support.

The growing interest from college students across the country for spring break mission experiences, along with the continuing needs expressed by the Cumberland Mountain community showed the need for an “official” college ministry. Mountain T.O.P. answered the call in 1997 and BREAK OUT was born!

Appalachian Culture

The Appalachian Culture is very unique. It is important to learn about the culture you will be spending a week in. There are three resources we are providing for you; 1) Websites for local newspapers in Mountain T.O.P.'s service area, 2) The article "Meet the Culture of Appalachia" and 3) resources we have found via the internet. Please feel free to do your own research and add to this list.

Websites

Grundy County: www.grundycountyherald.com

Warren County: www.southernstandard.net

White County: www.spartaexpositor.com

Bledsoe County: www.thebledsonian-banner.com

Meet the Culture of Appalachia

Understanding the Cumberland Mountain Culture of Appalachia

The intent of this essay is to introduce the Cumberland Mountain people to you. The history and background of the Cumberland Mountains will help you understand how to enter this culture when you come to camp. I would like to thank the Commission on Religion in Appalachia for providing up-to-date material concerning the region and culture within it. It is important for you to take time to briefly study the area to which you are coming to serve in order to prepare yourself for a cultural exchange experience. This requires an open mind and an open heart.

Mountain T.O.P. works very hard all year at participating in life with the people of the Cumberland Mountains. We do not presume to know a better way of living or that we are a type of charity organization here to "give away" services to the people. We strive to avoid paternalism; instead, we try to create an environment of partnership with the people in the region. This requires a give and take from each party involved. Mountain T.O.P. seeks to interact in community life and become involved in the lives of individuals throughout the region. We ask the communities to give to each other in an effort to help the communities help themselves. Through this type of effort, Mountain T.O.P. continues to be active throughout the region and in partnership with the people in the area.

Appalachian Tennessee is a land of high mountains and green forests, abundant springs and rivers, varied plants, animal and bird life. Its Cumberland range is big coal mining country. Its farms are traditionally small operations. The area to which you will be traveling is one of rich history and tradition.

The geographic boundaries of Appalachia include portions of 13 states, reaching from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It contains 398 counties in the following states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. West Virginia is the only state that the region completely covers. The region is rural and urban, rich and poor.

The...people who live there are as diverse as any other group one might gather from across this land.

In the region there are mountain folk, city folk, country folk, coal miners and steel workers, union workers and non-union workers, industrial workers and service workers, farmers and farm laborers, housewives and children, teachers and health workers, ministers and rabbis and priests, artists and poets, professionals, and technicians, lawyers and politicians, lobbyists and interest groups, executives and managers, little business people and big business people, coal companies and chemical companies, and industrialists and bankers. (1)

The 20 million people who live there are as diverse as any other group one might gather from across this land. (2) It is important for those of us who seek to understand Appalachia to recognize that the population of the region is by no means socially homogeneous. The unique aspect of Appalachia is that of the traditional, folk subculture. All or a majority of Appalachians cannot be assumed to be products of, or influenced by the traditional subculture. (3)

Though economically linked to the mainstream, the communities of the Central Appalachian region maintain the distinctive culture of miner-mountaineers. In its traditional aspects, this culture places a value upon rural lifestyle, relative isolation, and a harmony with nature not found in urban areas. There is a strong importance attached to personal relationships and personal interaction, and to the social organizations of kin, neighbors, and church. (4)

Fatalism has joined hands with traditionalism to give the mountain people a different outlook.

Mountain families are typically large. The custom of settling close to kin has made each little valley the domain of a single family. It is not unusual today to find families with four generations living side by side. Within the mountain culture, fatalism has joined hands with traditionalism to give the mountain people a different outlook.

While traditionalism can thwart the planners and molders of industry, education, and society in general, fatalism can stifle a people to believe that passive resignation becomes the approved norm, and acceptance of undesirable conditions becomes the way of life.

This fatalistic outlook has sometimes been a buffer against disappointment. People in this region are seldom optimistic about anything. Hope rests in tentative terms. Generally, society is subdued.

There are other traits of the Appalachian culture that seldom receive attention, yet deserve our immediate focus. These traits can be found in abundance in this region. They are traits of neighborliness, hospitality, love of place and land, modesty, bravery, sense of humor, loyalty, resourcefulness, and patriotism. We often fail to examine the benefits that result from placing a higher value on people over objects, continuity over change and individualism over group participation. It is important for someone entering the Appalachian culture to look for these positive traits so they can experience the total richness of the culture.

At this time in history, we are called to realize the situation in Appalachia. Appalachia is discovering several factors at work within the region. There are economic trends developing, human costs of economic decline and underlying causes working in these factors. Let us briefly look at these components of the region's development.

Hope rests in tentative terms.

“A recent Ford Foundation-sponsored study of the rural south, including many parts of Appalachia, made this observation:

After 2 decades of reasonably solid growth, many rural communities are finding themselves in serious trouble... Only when many rural areas failed to join in the national economic recovery was it recognized that the problems were not temporary effects of the business cycle. Instead, it has become increasingly clear that major structural changes are at work in the rural Southern economy, changes which are only intermittently visible, but that taken together promise profound and lasting consequences for the South. (5)

Economic trends and social issues are not encouraging as we look at some of the factors at hand. “Appalachia has often been a harbinger of need and a precursor of related change in America. The coal miners of the region provided crucial leadership in the dramatic growth of the industrial unions in the 1930’s. Mountaineers and the region’s economic conditions provided much of the inspiration for the 1960’s to respond ‘to the other America’. Grassroots efforts of the region on each decade since the 1950’s have provided reform movements for labor, occupational health, land use and reclamation, community health centers, environmental quality, maternal and children’s services, housing and a host of other issues and human needs.” (6) Now, just like the past, the Appalachian region needs national attention.

American economic trends since 1982 have created changes in the type of jobs available and the type of pay available to those in Appalachia. All of these changes are inter-related. “Jobs in high paying manufacturing and blue collar occupations declined, and jobs in the low wage service sector increased. These changes are also related to the redistribution of wealth since then. Without access to high paying jobs, the majority of Americans have problems attaining previous levels of middle class incomes. These economic changes, coupled with federal tax reforms and social program cutbacks of the 80’s, fostered a redistribution of wealth that brought us back to the most skewed income structure since before the new deal.” (7)

Nationally, a reshaping of the economy is occurring. Jobs in traditional sectors like manufacturing, mining and farming are decreasing while services like business services, health, and eating and drinking establishments are increasing. For many of the displaced workers, who are able to find work in the service industries, they experience cuts in wages, loss of seniority, benefits, and potential for advancement. Even within the service industries, automation and disinvestments are displacing the traditional work force.

There are human costs of the economic situation in the region. Many groups are affected: the poor, women, minorities, families and children, workers in the workplace, and communities in general. Within these groups, people experience low self-esteem, feelings of failure, increase of violence upon one’s self and against others, and growth in suicides and alcoholism. “Despite the improvement of 2 decades in Southern Appalachia, a solid core of counties in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi still have very high rates of poverty.”(8)

Despite the improvement of 2 decades in Southern Appalachia, a solid core of counties in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi still have very high rates of poverty.

There are underlying causes working within the region that are areas we can strive to effect through our services at Mountain T.O.P. Patterns are indicating that the concentration of land ownership and control are in the hands of a very few which limits the majority of the people throughout Appalachia. The poverty of the region lies not necessarily in the lack of economic wealth, but in the failure to control and distribute resources among the occupants in a democratic and equitable manner.

*Now, just like the past,
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The international arena offers its own problems for Appalachia. It seems to be a place where steel, textile, apparel, and other sources like coal can be found in the international market with cheaper labor and resources.

Here is an area where all of us must strive to protect American jobs while also fighting for the rights of the workers overseas. There are trends indicating a restructuring of basic industries that are replacing human labor with robots and machines. For some, this stimulates greater human potential; for others, this situation replaces the need for human involvement and activity in the work force. We must seek to maintain a balance within the work force so that human involvement is high.

In the culture of the Cumberland Mountains, the traits are different, the pace of life may be a little slower, and the priorities and values unique, but they offer us who are entering the region a learning opportunity as we seek to discover new cultures in our own United States. Allow yourself to be used by God to any extent that helps. Study the culture and prepare yourself to join with the mountain families in working together to meet the needs of everyone involved.

Footnotes

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2. D. Campbell Wychoff and Henrietta T. Wilkinson, eds., "Beautiful Upon the Mountain" (Memphis, TN: Board of Christian Education of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1984), 21.
3. Frank S. Riddel, ed., "Appalachia: Its People, Heritage and Problems" (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1984), xi.
4. John Gaventa, "Power and Powerlessness", University of Illinois Press, 1985, page 35.
5. Commission on Religion in Appalachia, "Economic transformation: The Appalachian Challenge" (Knoxville, TN C.O.R.A., 1992), pg 5
6. Richard A. Cuoto, "An American Challenge." (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, IA, 1994), ix-x.
7. Ibid. pg. 29
8. Ibid. pg. 146
9. Other Sources:
Appalachian State University, "Religion in Appalachia" web site, Dr. Conrad Ostwalt, Instructor, 1996
Wenger, Andrea Schrock, *Appalachia native sheds local light on federal welfare reform*, Mennonite Central Committee News Service, March 20, 1998.
Housing Assistance Council, "Housing Problems in Central Appalachia" web site, January, 2001.

Materials Philosophy

The Mountain T.O.P. experience can be a joyous and rewarding one - a community of believers gathered together for a week to serve the Lord. Mountain T.O.P. is in partnership with the people of the Cumberland Mountains and with the youth and adults who volunteer. A firm understanding of this concept is crucial to forming significant relationships during the week and after participants return home.

Mountain T.O.P. participants join a partnership agreement with the people in the communities they serve. There are three partners:

- 1) Mountain T.O.P.
- 2) Youth and adult volunteers from across the country
- 3) People living in the Cumberland Mountains

Each partner brings a unique element and makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts. The idea that $1+1+1$ is greater than 3 represents the synergy that occurs on the mountain.

What does each part bring? Mountain T.O.P. provides structure, staff, field work, and management of financial resources. The volunteers contribute money through their participant fee, labor and tools. Individuals, churches and businesses from the communities also contribute financially.

The families that Mountain T.O.P. directly works with give whatever they can. Their contribution is very important to the empowering of the people of the Cumberland Mountains (detailed in the Statement of Values). Families that cannot afford to contribute to a project financially are asked to find alternative ways to participate; which could be joining in the work or making a jug of tea. The resulting partnership raises the level of ownership and involvement of the families with whom we serve.

Occasionally a participant may want to make a contribution to a family. We encourage this kind of generosity, but ask that the partnership philosophy is always kept in mind. That same contribution made to Mountain T.O.P.'s materials fund may be better utilized and possibly applied to many projects. Mountain T.O.P. has year-round involvement in the community and will know well where resources are needed the most to help the most people.

Tool Safety Training

It is important that everyone is trained to safely use tools in order to assure that parents, youth, adults, pastors, and congregation members that the proper precautions have been taken. Mountain T.O.P.'s expectation is that all work sites are safe environments for those who are working there. We at Mountain T.O.P. spend many hours on safety training with our camp staffs and we want all groups to have the opportunity to learn how to maintain a safe environment while on the work sites themselves.

Using tools properly is an important element to the Service Project experience at Mountain T.O.P.! The following information is designed for you as the group leader to share with your youth and adults who will be attending camp. This session has been created so that each participant has a higher level of comfort out on the work sites with the various tools they will be using during the week. It's designed to increase the participant's knowledge of the various tools that they might use while at Mountain T.O.P. as well as teach them how to use the tools properly for the safest work site.

Know Your Tools

This is a good opportunity for you to go over the tool list with your group; you could even let them see and hold each tool as you go over it. Tool Requirements for groups are listed in The Core Guide, as well as the Community Tools listed in the Tool Process. **It is important to stress to each participant that they only have to use the tools they feel comfortable with while at Mountain T.O.P.!** We do not want anyone to think that they have to use a power saw or any other tool they do not feel comfortable in using. It is up to them.

Practicing With the Tools You Have Learned How to Use

We strongly encourage you to find some way to give the team a hands-on experience with power tools. Team members need to know how to safely use these tools. There are several ways you can help your team get this practice. Some ideas are listed below:

- Build a wooden cross to carry with you on your trip
- Construct tool boxes for van tools
- Plan a minor repair project at church
- Participate in a weekend mission project in your community
- Ask a contractor to come and speak to your team about tool safety and ask if he has some scrap wood that can be cut and nailed together.

Be creative in your approach to this practice, but do find a way for your team to get some experience with tools.

Please go over these safety rules for tools with your group:

1. Use each tool only for the job and the way it was designed for.
2. Keep fingers and hands away from cutting edges of tools.
3. Secure or clamp down wood being worked with.
4. Safety glasses should be worn at all times while using power tools.
5. Be patient and never use force.
6. Don't work with tools when tired. Alertness is necessary.
7. Don't wear loose clothing or jewelry, which can be caught in moving parts. Wear your nametag, but tuck it into your shirt.
8. Never use electrical tools in damp or wet locations.
9. Power tools must have adult supervision each time they are used. At no time are youth forced to use any tool they are uncomfortable with.
10. If extension cords are used, be sure they are heavy duty.
11. Unplug all electrical tools when finished and put them back in their case each time use is done. Don't leave any power tools unattended.
12. Keep tools sharp, clean and oiled. Make sure the tools are in good condition before using them.
13. Work areas should be large enough for people to remain safe during the use of power tools and should be tidy to avoid tripping over things.
14. The workspace should have proper equipment to use with the power tools like saw horses or level cutting areas for power saws.
15. Use ladders only on stable and level surfaces unless they are secured to prevent movement.
16. Keep the area around the top and bottom of ladders clear of debris.
17. Maintain ladders free of oil, grease, and other slipping hazards.
18. Don't tie ladders together to make a longer ladder.
19. Face the ladder when going up or down.
20. Don't carry objects or loads that could cause you to lose your balance and fall.
21. Don't use the top of a stepladder as a step.
22. Always use and lock the metal spreader or device that holds the front and back sections apart.
23. Don't move, shift, or extend ladders while they are in use.
24. Extend ladders at least 3' beyond the surface you are accessing so you have a handhold when getting on or off and set the ladder 1' away from a wall for every 4' that it extends (if ladder goes up 16', it should be 4' from base of wall.)

The Adult Role... What's That?

1. The Adult Role during the Preparation Process

The role of the adult during the preparation process is very crucial. The preparation process is a time of learning together and preparing to be a team in ministry. The adult is often the person who sets the tone of the session by showing enthusiasm as well as seriousness about the importance of preparation. When youth see adults wanting to learn, grow, and prepare, they begin to understand the necessity of working through the material.

Because adults are full participants in the Mountain T.O.P. experience, it is important for adults to share in the preparation process with the youth. This way everyone can build a mission team and learn to work together. By involving adults in the preparation, they will not only feel a part of the group, but will also know what to expect when they arrive at camp.

The adult can help the group leader in discussions by asking questions, by keeping the group motivated to learn more about the ministry in which they will be a part, and by helping to involve those youth who have participated with Mountain T.O.P. before. Involving persons who have been to camp before can be very exciting for the first timers! We encourage you to invite these people to share about their experiences, how they grew at Mountain T.O.P., the people they met in the Cumberland Mountains, and some of the different activities they did at camp. This will help others understand what to look forward to, as well as give them a feel for camp life! The group leader is encouraged to invite persons who have been to camp before to help lead the sessions, plan the closing devotions, and keep the group excited and enthusiastic about the upcoming experience.

2. The Adult Role at Camp and with the Camp Staff

The role of the adult at camp is one of support and partnership with the staff. It is important that all adults and staff work together so that the experience will be one of WHOLENESS for everyone involved. The Mountain T.O.P. experience is designed for youth, with adults playing a supportive role. Adults can empower youth to participate in worship, lead songs and grow in their Christian faith. Encouraging youth to take responsibility in camp is very beneficial to forming community at camp. When youth feel ownership in the experience, they learn and grow more.

The adult is a role model for the youth. Therefore, we encourage all adults to help set a positive, uplifting, spiritual, and motivating attitude at camp so that the TEAM BUILDING concept will work! If there is a problem, the adult who demonstrates care, concern, and love for others during the situation is a powerful model for the youth. In contrast, if the adult is negative, the youth will tend to be negative, thus damaging community growth. By keeping a positive outlook on the experience, adults teach youth a vital lesson in maturity.

Adults are expected to participate in 100% of the camp activities because they, just like

staff and youth, are a part of the community forming process. When everyone plays, works, and worships together, people begin to see a Christian community at work in their lives. Everyone working for the same goals and objectives is the power behind a community that is working for GOD!

Adults can hurt the community forming process by being negative, not participating in all activities, and working against the camp staff on decisions and discipline. We want adults, youth and staff to build up one another, empower each other to grow, and meet the needs of the Cumberland Mountain families. Working together really works! The beauty of Mountain T.O.P. is watching youth and adults building up the kingdom of Christ in the Cumberland Mountains.

3. The Adult Role in the Youth Renewal Group (YRG)

The adult is the designated driver for the YRG. The adult is also a team member, which means that we encourage adults to let youth take responsibility and leadership within the YRG. An example of this might be to select YRG leaders for a day. Each youth will select a day of the week to be the person responsible for checking tools/materials and making sure the YRG has everything before leaving camp (lunches, first-aid kits, water, etc.) This gives the youth a chance to experience leadership and taking responsibility. The adult plays a significant role in challenging youth in this area. Letting the group make decisions together is an effective way of being a team member. Some adults have the tendency to play the role of decision maker and decide what the group should do. While letting go of the decision-making can be difficult, we encourage adults to let the leadership formation be a group process so that the YRG becomes a team, working together for the good of everyone. Adults who encourage and empower the YRG to make decisions and take responsibility will see a tremendous difference in the youth with whom they work.

The adult brings to the Mountain T.O.P. ministry a maturity that the people in the Cumberland Mountains appreciate and look for in our YRGs. By guiding youth in decision-making and by sharing personal experiences, the adult adds a tremendous amount of security, safety, and growth to the camp community. We ask each adult to take this role seriously and prayerfully.

Suggested Questions for Adult Group Discussion

The Role of the Adult While Leading the Preparation Process

1. What is our understanding of the role of the adult during the preparation process?
2. How can we specifically encourage and involve our “veteran” members in the preparation process?
3. What can we as adults contribute to the preparation process?
4. Why is it important for the adults to go through the preparation process with the youth?
5. What are some ways we can teach the material and build excitement in our group?

The Role of the Adult at Camp

1. What is our understanding of the role of the adult at Mountain T.O.P.?
2. Why is it important for the adults to be good role models for the youth?
3. What does this statement mean? “Adults help to set the tone of the camp.”
4. Why is it important for adults to be 100% involved in the camp activities?
5. How can adults help or hurt the community forming process at camp?

The Role of the Adult in Relation to the Staff at Camp

1. What is our understanding of the role of the adult in relation to the camp staff?
2. How can adults help the staff run a successful camp?
3. What are some ways adults might aid the staff?
4. What does this statement mean? “Camp staff and adults should be in partnership together during the week.”
5. Why is a healthy relationship of adult to staff and vice-versa in youth camps so important?
6. What should adults expect from the camp staff?

The Role of the Adult in the YRG

1. What is our understanding of the role of the adult in the Youth Renewal Group?
2. What does this statement mean? “The adult is a team member.”
3. What are some specific ways adults can help the youth in YRGs develop leadership skills?
4. Why does each YRG have an adult in it?

Note to Leader:

Were there any concerns/issues expressed that did not get fully answered or need additional information? If yes, please write us a note indicating the concern and what you feel is the real issue. We will respond as quickly as possible. Thanks!

Special Interview “From the T.O.P.”

with Rev. Ed Simmons, Executive Director of Mountain T.O.P.

Introduction: This printed interview has been included in an attempt to convey a personal message to the participating adults. Experience has shown that the key to an effective week of ministry is the preparation level of both the youth and adults. This interview will hopefully add to the preparation level.

QUESTION: Why is adult preparation so important to the success of the camp week?

ANSWER: The Mountain T.O.P. journey has involved many adults who have consistently provided their counsel and support. Without them, this “laboratory” of putting faith into action could not exist. Sadly there have been some adults who have come not understanding their role or their purpose. The behavior of the contributing adult is significantly more positive than the adult who is more focused on their personal comfort or being in control-- not willing to be a responsible follower. Based on discussions with both, the major problem is lack of preparation, understanding, and willingness to partner with other adults and the Mountain T.O.P. summer staff.

QUESTION: Why is it so difficult to influence adults to prepare?

ANSWER: I think the secret is in the recruitment of the adults chosen to come with the group by the Youth Director or the contact person. The adults-to-youth ratio requirement is difficult to obtain, especially for groups that are adult-poor in their normal youth program throughout the year. I think in order to sign-up the required number the prospect is told, “All you have to do is drive a car-I’ll take care of the rest.” This is only partially true. Without the whole truth, adults are signed-on without the necessary understanding. They are set up to fail! They never realize the importance of preparing until it is too late. When our staff gets confronted with “I’m not going to work in this dirty place!” or “I’m in charge of the work team - what is this YRG stuff?” there is little doubt that they are not prepared. The youth members of the YRG are crippled, and more than likely, they will have a bad experience on the site and in camp – which becomes a missed opportunity to help youth grow in faith and maturity.

QUESTION: So what advice do you have for selecting adults?

ANSWER: Adults should have the ability and willingness to interact with youth and model values of servanthood. Parents are good sources if the parent and child have a clear understanding of their roles, especially for the youth's sake. Young adults with small children make good candidates due to their desire to relate to teenagers in preparation for their own growing child. The YRG concept is powerful because of the opportunity for renewal and throwing away old labels. Adults that enjoy “participation” rather than “observation” are excellent camper prospects. I have made myself available to talk with many of the “difficult”

adults. In most every case, the individual was frustrated and embarrassed at not being prepared. It is important that all participants become “partners” with the staff and the camp community at-large. This requires conscientious leadership on everyone's part.

QUESTION: Does this concept ever fail?

ANSWER: Sure! This is especially true when certain adults are acting “childlike” themselves. Taking charge of the situation becomes impossible. There is a difference in having fun and acting stupid. The youth should never forget that the adult is a responsible adult. This means exercising multiple roles based on the situation so that everyone has the opportunity to have a great experience. Another personal philosophy that has served me well is “It is fun to be a Christian!” Enjoyment and fellowship in worship, work and play become the mortar of building a focused and lasting community experience. This is quite different than allowing youth to be disruptive, take life-threatening risks, or attacking anyone's self-worth. A desire to be liked can override an adult taking the responsibility to stop or correct a disruptive situation.

The Youth Renewal Group (YRG) is a very powerful, spirit -led model. The YRG allows youth to become renewed in their spiritual walk through new friendships and adult modeling. It works, if youth are allowed to experience self-discovery rather than a continual bossing and directing.

QUESTION: What is the relationship between the adults and the staff?

ANSWER: Typically, it is very healthy. However, if adults come to camp either not understanding their role or not willing to assume the appropriate role when needed, their lives, the staff's lives and the youth's lives will be miserable. This is both a preparation issue and an issue of not accepting the staff as the primary leadership for the week. The 7 to 8 young adults on staff at your camp have been intensively trained. They are committed young Christians wanting to be excellent. This staff experience has led many of our former staff into becoming ministers, youth directors, Christian educators, social workers, teachers, physicians, nurses, and attorneys. They return to Mountain T.O.P. with youth groups as they assume leadership positions in their local church. They are a powerful force for our church at-large. This is a rare opportunity for all of us!

We have an obligation to be enablers for these young adults to succeed. They not only need our camp cooperation, but they need our counsel - they deserve it! They spend many long hours trying to ensure that your camp week will be life-changing in a Christ-like way. The staff deserves the benefit of the doubt!

QUESTION: What will be important for adults to do in order to be in partnership?

ANSWER: It means joining the staff in setting the tone for Christian community by participating with enthusiasm and accepting the guidelines for the week. I am not suggesting “blind” agreement, which is difficult with so many different “frames of reference” coming together for such a short time. I do believe that acceptance with mutual understanding is important as long as what is being asked is not life-threatening or contrary to our Christian beliefs and faith.

Our staff will be expecting and asking for feedback from each participating adult. Hopefully, each adult will be expecting and asking for their feedback. Without timely mutual feedback, the community will break down through discomfort, disagreement, and misunderstanding. Everybody loses! The worst thing is that the youth lose! Another missed opportunity!

QUESTION: It sounds like adults do all the giving and no taking. Is there anything that adults should expect to gain?

ANSWER: Most adults will give testimony to getting much more than they gave. What a joy to be a part of offering young people the opportunity to put their faith into action. I have a special place in my heart for each adult participant because of their sacrifice - time away from family, use of vacation time, living in rustic conditions, and carrying responsibility. Why in the world would they do this? I know they love the Lord and they believe in their young people. They want for them the “good” life. The adults that come prepared and demonstrate a good understanding of their roles always feel they received more than they gave. It is in the giving that one receives.

QUESTION: Speak to the adults in terms of forming relationships with young men and women, based on society's heightened awareness of sexual harassment, abuse, and other types of misconduct.

ANSWER: Seasoned youth workers know the fine line that one must walk in forming a nurturing relationship versus a misunderstood sexual relationship. Sometimes people, young and old, misunderstand the true intent of being kidded, telling off-color jokes, hugging and touching. In most recent years we have had more reported cases of young women being harassed by an unsuspecting adult camper. There was no wrongdoing in any of the cases legally. All parties were scarred emotionally, however.

Society is quick to judge! Youth are more aware, as they should be, of conduct that is suggestive of violating their personal being. There is a difference in a Christian hug and a sexual hug. My message is to all adults, especially males, is to please be careful where and how you show Christian affection. It can be misunderstood. Many times perception is the defended truth. Please note what we tell our young adult staff: “Never put yourself in a potentially compromising

situation.” Perception may be stronger than truth. These young adult staff members are placed on a pedestal and sexual attractions by younger campers is natural. Demonstrations of those feelings have no place in our community.

As Jesus charged his disciples in the garden in Matthew 26:38 “...keep watch with me...” and then in verse 40, “And He came to His disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “so you could not keep the watch with me for one hour?” We are all asked to watch and pray - to keep the watch.

QUESTION: Well, anything else?

ANSWER: I do have one other comment. In reviewing the interview questions and answers I am struck that these same answers continue to ring true year after year. The need for the answers continues to exist. A few adults who return still seem clueless about the importance of their role and of preparing for the experience. I am continually amazed at the number of adults who gather for the adult meeting on Sunday each camp week and have not had the opportunity to read this interview. Some are still surprised at what is expected. Their leader has been very unfair to them, to the staff and to the mission. It is a perfect set-up for failure. I plead with the leadership of each group to prepare everyone, especially the adults. It is the single most contributing factor to a poor experience.