



Mennonite
Mission
Network

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EXTENDING BEYOND

We are called to care and serve

By Marisa Smucker, executive director

"Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'" — Matthew 25:37-40 (CEB)

SOOPer Steve Good, Norris Harris and Keion Lewis work together to fix a mower at Koinonia Farm, in Plains, Georgia. The mower is now fixed! Photo by Rachel Good.



At the Mennonite Mission Network booth during Follow Jesus '25, we shared stickers featuring Matthew 25:35-36, a portion of the Scripture included above. At the core, I believe these verses highlight God's command to love our neighbors. Jesus made it clear throughout the gospels, in these verses and many others, that we are called to care for one another. We are given many examples of how Christ served others, caring for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Ultimately, Christ's focus on serving was about being in relationship with others and connecting people to God. The commandment to love our neighbors is not just about providing food, water and clothes, or visiting those in need and welcoming the stranger; it moves us to truly know and care for our neighbors, recognizing we are all wonderfully created by God.

As part of the Anabaptist faith, we believe that community is the center of our lives. Therefore, we also care about the communities, organizations and movements that care for all of God's creation. At Mission Network, we are deeply committed to partnerships that foster these connections. Our SOOP (Serving Opportunities with Our Partners) program reflects our call to partnership and our desire to provide flexible opportunities for individuals and families to join God's work in the world. The SOOP program allows participants to serve as they are able, for the time that they have available. There is a place for everyone to learn, grow and share the abundance that comes from God. My prayer is that we will all heed the Spirit's nudge and respond to God's call to love and serve others. ■

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— Matthew 25:40
(CEB)



Photo provided

The Cobb family, at Drift Creek Camp, wears matching SOOP shirts. Top row (left to right): Sydney, Ivan, Garrison and Emma. Bottom row: Alyssa (Ivan's wife), Jen and Adam.

Faith, family and frying pans: Ten years at Drift Creek Camp

By Jen Cobb

In 2013, our family took a leap of faith and signed up for a short-term mission trip through Mennonite Mission Network's SOOP program. We were matched with Drift Creek Camp, a Mennonite camp in Siuslaw National Forest, Lincoln City, Oregon. Three of our children, Sydney (8th grade), Ivan (5th grade) and Garrison (3rd grade), joined us, while Emma (9th grade) attended that year's Mennonite convention.

Our week at camp was spent in the kitchen, preparing meals for campers and staff. Our experience working together as a family was unforgettable. We have made 10 more trips since that first week, deepening our connection to the camp and its community. Powered only by batteries and a generator, Drift Creek Camp taught us the value of simplicity, teamwork and service.

Every trip has stories of funny mishaps, quiet moments and small lessons, all of which have lingered long after each departure. Over the years, our time spent there has grown from an annual short-term mission trip to a cherished family tradition. We fall in love with Drift

Creek Camp every year.

The first trip was quite the initiation into camp life. We cooked for over a hundred campers, and every meal — fresh bread, tomato soup and more — was made from scratch. Sydney was the only one of our kids who joined us in the kitchen, while our younger two children spent their days exploring the camp with one of the caretakers' sons. My husband, Adam, and I never quite knew what adventures they got into, but they always managed to show up for meals covered in what could only be described as “camp.” Mud, dirt and pine needles followed them like a trail — a small but constant reminder of the freedom and wonder of camp life.

In the kitchen, we were under the watchful eye of Glen Oesch, the food service director, who carefully put together the week's menu and offered advice in the busy kitchen. We didn't know it that first week, but Glen would become one of the many unexpected gifts God gave us at Drift Creek Camp. His guidance and wisdom helped us survive our first week and shaped how

we approached each subsequent visit. Glen has become more than a mentor in the kitchen; he is part of the Drift Creek Camp family we've grown to love.

Many of Glen's recipes showcase his signature humor. According to the recipe, we needed to say, "I love you, little guys," while placing dinner rolls in the oven or to "agitate until thoroughly annoyed (either you or the ingredients, whichever happens first)" while making a favorite breakfast casserole. He was meticulous about portions, too, and always gave us tips on how to ensure we had enough food for everyone.

By the end of our first week, we were exhausted and exhilarated. But as we packed up to leave, one thought kept returning: Emma needed to experience this, too. Emma loved to bake and had shown an interest in becoming a dietitian. What could be a better place to nurture that passion than in a bustling camp kitchen, where everything was made from scratch? We left Drift Creek Camp the first year sensing God was calling our entire family back.

We returned two years later, with all our children, who each had their own role at camp, but when Emma met Glen, something shifted. Upon learning Emma was interested in becoming a dietitian, the kitchen hierarchy changed instantly. Glen saw a fellow foodie in her, and from then on, she became the head baker. He treated her as an equal, not just a volunteer. That recognition sparked a close relationship that would continue to grow in the years ahead. It reminded us that God sees our children's gifts long before they are fully formed and places mentors on their path to nurture them.

Our children's camp experiences have grown with

each trip, as they've each found their own way to contribute and grow while there. Emma served as a counselor and completed a kitchen internship with Glen one summer, developing her leadership and food service abilities. Sydney had to step up her baking game when Emma burned herself or was unable to attend, learning resilience and independence in the process. Ivan stepped into leadership, also spending time as a counselor, and last year, he brought along his fiancée, Alyssa. She quickly

fell in love with camp life and eagerly jumped in to help alongside the rest of us in the kitchen, even before she felt confident in her kitchen skills. Garrison, who is happiest outdoors, loves hiking daily in the forest. When it comes to meal prep, however, he'd much rather run the dishwasher than cook!

In the kitchen, our family learned to work as a team, each contributing differently. We can tackle anything from washing lettuce and chopping onions to sautéing and roasting. Emma typically takes the lead on the yeast breads and desserts, though she happily shares some cookie-baking duties with her siblings. Together, we've discovered that, even in the busiest kitchen, there's room for each of us to serve and learn, as we work together.

These personal journeys were encapsulated two years ago, when Garrison was baptized in the camp creek — a moment that felt like the heart of Drift Creek Camp: simple, sacred and surrounded by God's creation. That creek is more than water; it's a holy place, where God met our son. I truly believe our children encounter God at Drift Creek Camp, through the forest, water, work

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Photo provided



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Above: Alyssa Cobb bakes bread in the kitchen at Drift Creek. Below: The Cobb family serves on one of their early SOOP assignments at Drift Creek Camp, in 2015.



You can support SOOP and other programs that give individuals and families the opportunity to serve and live out God's calling in their lives. Visit MennoniteMission.net/Donate to get started!



Serve in partnership

SOOP provides opportunities for participants to use their gifts and skills to work alongside others in a network of ministries across the church. These short-term assignments are designed for retirees with flexibility, adults 25+ years old, groups and families. In addition to Drift Creek Camp, SOOP participants serve in more than 60 locations in North America, as well as a number of international locations. Scan the QR code or visit **MennoniteMission.net/SOOP** for more information.



and relationships that make it such a special place.

Each experience, whether in the kitchen or the woods, has become an avenue for God to teach, guide and meet us as a family. Our children have all encountered God in their own way through Drift Creek Camp, as each memory and story ties us closer to the camp. It's a place where our family has grown in faith, skill and love for one another.

Our story wouldn't be complete without naming some of the many mentors and friends who have made Drift Creek Camp our second family. We've built deep friendships with the camp directors, Tony and Brenda Kauffman, whose steady leadership and warm spirits have anchored Drift Creek Camp. Our children are similar in age, and we have bonded over shared parenting experiences. We look forward to connecting and sharing stories with them each year, as we fellowship around the dinner table.

There are also the caretakers, each bringing their unique personality into our story. Chris Colvin quickly became part of our crew — so much so that we “adopted” him into the family. Gabe Barnes, then, joked he had been trying to get “adopted” by us for years and couldn't believe Chris beat him to it. Little moments like these remind us how wide the Drift Creek Camp family is.

We've also been blessed to work alongside counselors, many of whom were campers during our first week at Drift Creek Camp. Watching them grow from wide-eyed campers into leaders has been a gift and a reminder of

how God nurtures faith across generations. Through Tony and Brenda and the counselors, God reminds us that our holy family is much bigger than our own flesh and blood.

The opportunity to unplug and work next to my children has been one of the ways I have been drawn closer to both God and my children by God's hand. Now that

Adam and I are empty nesters, our weeks at Drift Creek Camp have become a way to reconnect with our family, while renewing our faith. It's a blessing that God grows our faith as a family while we serve together.

There's something profoundly moving about connecting with God while surrounded by the towering trees, creek and hum of camp life. Hearing our children's stories and enjoying family fellowship as we work in the kitchen is just as meaningful to us. Drift Creek Camp has

become a sacred space, where family and faith have come together in ways we could never have planned.

Looking back, it's incredible to reflect on how much Drift Creek Camp has shaped our family story. What began as a short-term mission trip has become an intertwining of service, relationships and renewal. We don't know how many more times we'll take the winding road to camp, but we know Drift Creek Camp will always be part of our faith and family. In the end, it's not only our story but God's story — one that has taught us that, when we are serving with open hands, God gives us joy, found in the dough, the sound of the creek and the faces of God's people. ■

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