



Top: First Aid survival club learned how to field split a leg.
Right: Plants and baked goods auctioned at Homecoming.



Camp Deerpark

SUMMER/FALL 2025

A MINISTRY OF THE NEW YORK CITY MENNONITE CHURCHES

CAMP DEERPARK OWNER CHURCHES

Believers Mennonite Garifuna Ministries
Pastor Andrew Nuñez

Centro Misionero Cristiano
Pastor Aristidez Shee

Evangelical Garifuna Church
Pastor Lilian Flores
Retired Pastor Celso Jaime

Evangelical Garifuna Church of Brooklyn
Pastor Martin Alvarez

Evangelical Garifuna Church of Manhattan
Pastor Margarito Martinez

Friendship Community Church
Pastor Kenneth L. Thompson

Grace and Peace Mennonite Church
Pastor Anita Castle

Iglesia Evangelical Menonita Eben-Ezer
Pastors Julio and Ana Damaso

Immanuel Community Church
Pastor Mark Perri

Infinity Mennonite Church
Pastor Albert Taylor

King of Glory Tabernacle

Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship

Mennonite Bible Fellowship, CT
Pastor Cedric Smith

Mennonite Evangelistic Tabernacle
Pastor Nestalis DeLeon

Muros de Fuegos
Pastor Maria Teresa Flores

North Bronx Mennonite Church
Pastor Ruth Wenger

United Revival Mennonite Church
Bishop Nicolas Angustia

Valley of Jesus Mennonite Church
Pastors Bernardo & Linda Rodriguez

THE ECLECTIC SOUNDS OF SUMMER CAMP BY KEVIN C. SMITH



This summer, our camp embarked on a unique experiment to assess the impact of having multiple strong leaders in key leadership roles. Traditionally, each top leadership position at summer camp is filled by a single individual. However, this year, we appointed two Summer Program Directors, Joyse Saravria-Smith and Kelley Thompson—and two Summer Camp Pastors—Celmali Jamie and Vini Quinteros. Alongside them were our usual Head Male and Head Female Counselors, a Head Cook, and a Program Assistant Supervisor, each distinguished as strong leaders and each making a meaningful shift in their roles.

It was a privilege to witness the unfolding of this summer's events. The experience

brought back memories of the summer of 2014, my first year directing summer camp. That year, our former executive director Ken offered me words of wisdom: "Kevin, summer camp is like an orchestra and you're the conductor directing each section/department to flow together. Always having your head on a swivel and seeing the bigger picture." These words have stayed with me as an impactful analogy that continues to inspire my own personal leadership development. Even now, eleven years later, I carry that advice with me. I made sure to pass this insight on to our 2025 Program Directors, Kelley and Joyse.

As Operations Director, I had the unique opportunity to observe this "masterpiece" called Summer Camp from a front-row seat. It was truly inspiring to see the harmonious creation of beautiful music, the forging of new friendships, and the emergence of spiritual awakenings. Our conductors, Joyse and Kelley, led the program with creativity and enthusiasm. The camp Pastors not only led Bible class and campfire sessions but also made themselves available throughout the day to inspire, encourage, and build personal bonds with both campers and staff—modeling the relationship Jesus had with His disciples.

Our dedicated young counselors and program/kitchen assistants played a crucial role in maintaining the rhythm and energy of camp activities. They ensured that our camp remained fun and impactful, upheld the standards of our Mennonite camp values, demonstrated passion for their work, and served as exemplary role models for everyone. Just like an orchestra, our camp represented a beautiful blend of families, departments,

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Camp Deerpark is owned by the Mennonite Churches of New York City.

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WISH LIST

- Heavy Duty full size pick up
- Hot water tank for admin house
- Backup generator for kitchen
- Hot water heaters for Spruce Lodge, more needed
- Dump trailer

THANK YOU!

- Hot water heaters for Spruce Lodge

WANTED: VOLUNTEER WEEKEND HOSTS

Contact Ashley at
deerparkofficestaff@gmail.com
for more information

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SUMMER STAFF REFLECTIONS:

My name is **Jeffrey Rodriguez**, and I’m a proud Brooklyn native shaped by its vibrant Dominican Heritage. Being born and raised in NYC, I carry with me the strength, ambition, and spirit of both my heritage and my hometown. I’m a dedicated, hardworking individual driven by a deep sense of leadership, always striving to inspire and support those around me. As a loving father to a beautiful daughter, I’m motivated every day to lead by example and pursue growth for both of us. Grounded in family and fueled by hope, I’m ready to make my mark with passion and purpose.

I never imagined I would be working at camp growing up, I always saw it as a place just for relaxation and fun. Yet this summer, I stepped into the role of Program Assistant Supervisor, and everything changed. My team and I truly did it all from running water and garbage duties to preparing and lighting the fire for cookouts and campfires. Whenever there was an event, whether it was movie night, a field game, Talent show or a banquet, we were the ones setting up and making it happen. One of the funniest moments came during cabin cleanup checks. Over time, the campers began getting creative and started leaving snacks for us in their rooms, a delightful surprise that always brought a smile. Every single one of these tasks were brand new to me. Nevertheless, through doing them, I developed new skills like leadership, organization, adaptability, and even a sense of play. I learned to stay upbeat and engaged even when facing something unfamiliar or outside my comfort zone. Camp taught me that you could grow, laugh, and lead all at the same time.

Working at camp this summer was a truly eye-opening experience. It came with many ups and downs from being far away from home and my family, to adjusting to new responsibilities, and learning how to work closely with people who were mostly younger than I was. At times, it was challenging, but in the midst of it all, I realized something deeper: God had placed me exactly where He wanted me to be. I began to form strong bonds with my team, despite our age differences, and those friendships became a support system that helped carry me through the summer. Spiritually, camp had a powerful impact on me. Worshiping God in the mountains was unlike anything I’ve experienced before, peaceful, raw, and incredibly moving. One of the most powerful moments was watching the kids worship during the campfire. Their pure, honest faith motivated me to reconnect with God and deepen my own relationship with Him. Professionally, the experience pushed me to grow as well. In my current job, I work with 3rd and 4th graders before, but at camp, I was also responsible for engaging with older kids and teens. That taught me how to better listen, understand, and support youth at different stages of life.

Overall, camp was a place of growth, connection, and purpose. The friendships I made, the challenges I overcame, and the spiritual growth I experienced have all left a lasting impact on my life. Camp taught me that you can grow, laugh, and lead all at the same time.

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Hi, my name is **Nathan Layton** from Tampa, Florida. I learned about Camp Deerpark from the previous director, Ken Bontrager, who thought working here would help me grow. I pursued this opportunity, because I do want to learn, grow, and to be better. I am currently working in maintenance and kitchen support, learning about work, time management, and getting things done. I have also enjoyed capturing awesome moments as the camp’s camera/media person. I have made good friends and as the season change, I look forward to learning more about camp.



FROM THE CO-SUMMER PROGRAM DIRECTOR’S HEART

BY **JOYSE SMITH**

Some may recognize my name from previous newsletters. I was born and raised in Harlem, NY, and grew up attending Evangelical Garifuna Church of the Bronx, under the leadership of Pastor Celso Jaime. I was first introduced to Camp Deerpark by way of our annual church summer retreats. These were weekends that I looked forward to each year.

For the past two years, I served as the Summer Program Director. This summer I shared the role with my best friend, Kelley Thompson, as a Co-Director. Together we were responsible for the daily operations of the camp program, including but not limited to hiring staff, camper, parent engagement, and all other administrative duties.

I felt that working with Kelley and other reliable leadership staffers was a summer for the record books, a summer full of new traditions, old memories, and miracles that only God could have performed.” My biggest highlight from this summer was God showing Himself to be a provider and a way maker. There were some challenges that caused us to pivot, but God showed that He can truly make the impossible possible. They were blessed a multitude with the two loaves and five fish that they were given.

Throughout the summer, we continued to see God move in and through the amazing summer staff and beautiful camper lives. The Lord never took his hands off of CDP. With that, I trust that The Lord will continue to move and direct all summer staffers and camper lives as we move into the fall season and the next chapters of their lives.

BY **KELLEY THOMPSON**

I am from Mount Vernon, NY. I was introduced to Camp Deerpark around 2017, by her bestie, Joyse Saraiva-Smith. Since then, I have worked at camp for several years but never got a chance to work with Joyse. This summer was surreal that I was finally able to work with her.

As I served as Co-Program Director with Joyse, we had the opportunity to oversee summer camp staff and campers, helped to create a safe, Christ-centered, and fun environment for everyone. Having a passion for youth development in Christ and being a minister at my church in Mount Vernon, this summer was simply divine for me.

This summer was full of nuggets of lessons and pockets of fun, but to me, the support was impactful. This was my first year in senior leadership. I had to navigate many scenarios, but I did not do it alone. I had help and support from Joyse, Kevin Smith, Ben & Susan Cheek, and two great camp Pastors, Cel-mali Jaime and Vini Quinteros. They all went above and beyond to support us, ensuring that needs were met so Joyse and I could focus on the campers’ experience. I am grateful for the impromptu prayers, the laughter, the creativity, and the sacrifice. Albeit, their support in carrying the weight of summer camp were mainly behind the scenes, it is worth mentioning them, because impact is often the result of a phenomenal team.

With the conclusion of 2025 summer camp, I resumed my job for the Department of Education and look forward to helping Camp Deerpark plan for Summer Camp 2026 in any way that I can.

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and generations working together. This unity allowed our summer theme, “Lost and Found in Christ,” to come alive in ways that were both meaningful and relatable. While there were mistakes and trials along the way, the enthusiasm and resilience of our staff, along with the excitement of campers eager to return next year, highlighted the success of our approach. It reaffirmed my belief in the power of a collaborative and impactful summer experience.

Watching these diverse individuals use their unique gifts—their “instruments”—to empower our youth to serve Christ was overwhelming in the best way. It was not just for Camp Deerpark, but for something greater: the glory of God’s Kingdom. Seeing our leadership staff equip future pastors, deacons, teachers, and the next generation was truly inspiring.

Indeed, this summer camp was a beautiful orchestra. Amen.

WEEKEND GROUP
COST CORNER

Camp hosts retreat groups on weekends year round. The goal is to be an affordable place for people to fellowship, build relationships, and be refreshed. Guests typical stay is 2 nights and 5 meals. On average, Camp charges \$169 per adult, but it actually costs \$214.11. Here’s a breakdown of this cost:

Administration	30%	--	\$64.23
Guest Services	23%	--	\$49.25
Food Services	33%	--	\$70.65
Lodging	14%	--	\$29.97