

Sermon: Update on Camp Kum-Ba-Yah

Mike Mayer - July 9, 2017

Good Morning.

I am so very happy to be here today.

Dolly has asked that I bring you all up-to-date as to what is going on at Camp Kum-Ba-Yah and the beautiful property that surrounds this church.

I am very sorry that Will and Dolly could not be here today as they have been a part of Camp Kum-Ba-Yah for the very earliest days of the camp. Dolly was one of the first members of the Church of the Covenant. Dolly and Will met as teenagers here. Dolly was one of the very first camp counselors at the camp. She and Will have worked tirelessly to support Camp Kum-Ba-Yah.

In fact, this church and the camp have been connected from the start!

The real title of my presentation today should be "Where Will the Children Play"

I want to ask you to do something now. Please close your eyes and keep them closed until I tell you to open them. I want you to imagine what you hear.

Do you hear something? (recording of children in woods and opening songs)

What a beautiful sound. Children at play. I see many of you smiling at the memory of those sounds in your life.

Yes, the 67th year of Camp Kum-Ba-Yah is off to a wonderful start. Everywhere you look the camp is full of joy and happiness.

New friends are being made.

Young councilors are developing in to young men and women.

The campers are being given new challenges and making new discoveries:

I would like to tell you a little about what I have seen this season.

Zip line and Post-Man Walk (story told of young 9-year girls from center city walking the 25-foot-high postman walk and using the new 900-foot-long zip)

Fishing (story about campers catching a small fish and while it was being brought in a large cat-fish took it and broke the campers rod.... how excited all were)

Learning to swim (story of fun in the pool)

Mother bringing her son to camp late. (story about a mother from the inner city, who was a CIT and councilor in the past bringing her son to camp.)

Cooking over a campfire (story about the experience of toasting marshmallow's over the open fire at a campsite)

Story of a child coming up to Pat and announcing, "I have discovered nature!!"

YES, after all these years, the camp is still relevant and continues to reflect Bev Cosby's dream.

There is a quote from Deepak Chopra's book "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success" that I would like to paraphrase.

He says that everyone has a purpose in life... a unique gift or special talent to give to others.

When we blend this unique talent with service to others, we fully experience the power of our own God-Given Spirit. Releasing our spirit is the goal we should all strive to achieve.

Yes, we should strive to release the divinity within us. As we do this we will see that this divinity is all around us, wherever we go, in whatever we see ... in the eyes of a child, in the beauty of a flower, in the flight of a bird.

When we begin to experience our life as the miraculous expression of divinity.... not occasionally.... but all the time, then we will know the true meaning of success.

Bev Cosby knew his purpose in life.

Bev Cosby had learned to see the divinity in all things.

Camp Kum-Ba-Yah began with the dream of one man who had found his purpose in life.

In early 1950, Beverly Cosby was a young seminary student returned to his home in Lynchburg. Think of it, that was 67 years ago, I was only 9 years old.

"Bev" saw the farmland that he had known as a child being developed. He and several others began to be concerned that in the near future, children would no longer have woods and open fields in which to explore, learn, and play. They began to ask themselves:

"Where will the Children Play"

Unlike most of us who only worry about the future, Bev decided to do something about it.

What we see all around us did not happen at once. The camp began with as few as 10 campers and four councilors.

In 1950, Bev began by providing a gathering place for a small group of neighborhood children in his home. Similar summer programs were being developed at the Lynchburg Christian Fellowship in downtown.

In the mid 1950's, Bev Cosby's father gave five acres of land to be used a playing field. Bev dedicated his summers to the camp program.

In 1955, Camp Kum-Ba-Yah was formally incorporated as a non-profit organization.

Through the 1970's there was significant expansion and development of the camp. Additional plots of land were added to the original playing field and today the camp operates on over 40 acres of land that back up to the ten acres of woods behind Bedford Elementary School.

In the 1970's the pool was expanded, the Youth House/ Bath House was constructed, art shelters were built in honor of the Herb Moor family and the Cosby family. Over ten campsites have been built in the woods along the streams that flow out of Long Lake. Our famous three-story tree house and climbing wall. A large organic garden was also added.

Bev's dream of a place for children to gather for play and learning was unfolding with God's help.

More than a dream, Bev had faith. Faith that his dream was possible with God's help!

The growth of the camp took a back seat to another situation associated with the tensions associated with mandated integration that took place in the 1960's. The property and camp was opened to all and many left.

God led the camp and the church through this period and today, Camp Kum-Ba-Yah summer day camp serves over 800 children, counsels, and staff. Camp Kum-Ba-Yah continues to provide these children with a wonderful summer camping experience.

Camp Kum-Ba-Yah offers summer day camp for children of all racial, cultural, and religious affiliations, and economic circumstances. Those who can afford to pay do so. Those who cannot receive scholarship assistance so that no child is ever turned away. Over 45% of our campers are provided with financial assistance

Today, Camp Kum-Ba-Yah offers over 40 acres for campers to explore the natural world around them. Experience personal discovery through challenging activities in a safe and encouraging environment. The camp provides opportunity for all to develop friendships through shared responsibility, play and learning. Campers join us from every part of the city and every walk of life.

We teach our campers – the children of our collective community – how to lead a healthy life to become self-reliant and confident.

Yes, with Bev's dream, Faith in God and hard work, the camp is as relevant today as it was in 1950's

The camp really developed a reputation for excellence during this time. The programs grew and expanded to serve the needs of the community. By this time, his dream, with God's help, had grown to a community dream.

Many contributed to the camp's success. Dedicated commitment by many contributors, directors and councilors and community support as well as this church have led to the expansion of programs offered by the camp.

Last year, over 1,000 first grade children, from the Lynchburg School System, came to the property to enjoy a day of environmental education.

This year, 450 elementary school children from Bedford School System came to the property to enjoy a day of activities.

Several early learning centers have visited the property and enjoyed our new Environmental Education Program.

An outdoor classroom is available to Bedford Hills Elementary School which is available to them to use as a complement to their education program.

As most of you know we dedicated "Ben's Tower". This tower allows easy to two zip lines to honor the memory of Ben Kunkle who was a counselor at the camp for several years. This was a major contribution by the community and the Kunkle family. Kids can take a three-football field long 45-second zip line ride from the tree house to the playing field through the woods.

Bev Cosby was patient with his dream. He trusted that God would unfold the dream in God's time. He was willing to let the seeds he had planted grow and unfold to be what God intended the dream to be.

It is now becoming clear that we are entering a new time of opportunity for this property.

New seeds are now being planted that are born out of Bev's greater dream for the property.

The time is right. Yes, support for implementing Bev. Cosby's full dream is unfolding.

Well the seeds of Bev's expanded dream are just taking root. This dream for the future is still unfolding, but I will tell you what I see.

So, what does this expanded dream look like?

There is a growing awareness around the world regarding the importance of getting children outdoors and into the natural environment.

The board of KBY is beginning to visualize now is the development of year-round programs that will meet the needs of the young children in our community and further fulfill Bev's dream.

This 45-acre urban forest is perfectly situated to fulfill Bev's original dream. I can visualize this property being associated with several key activities.

The year-round program we envision would include

1. Camp Kum-Ba-Yah
2. Environmental Education Programs.
3. A new Children's Discovery Park (mission Group Rachel Wilson) (Donation from the COC)
4. Outdoor Classrooms that the schools can utilize.
5. An expanded Community Garden
6. A high ropes adventure park for young teenagers

I would love to see this beautiful property "Re-branded" and identified as "Cosby Woods".

What a wonderful tribute it would be to Bev. Cosby's dream to call this property "Cosby Woods"

We are not talking about changing the nature of Camp Kum-Ba-Yah; only expanding into new year-round program for children of all ages.

Camp Kum-Ba Yah would not be changed. It would continue as a summer day camp as always. Only I would become known as Camp Kum-Ba-Yah at Cosby Woods.

I can see these new programs known as:

1. The Children's Discovery Park at Cosby Woods
2. Environmental Education Center at Cosby Woods
3. Outdoor education classrooms at Cosby Woods
4. Community Garden at Cosby Woods

I can see "Cosby Woods" becoming a focal point for young children and their mothers to experience the beauty and excitement of exploring and learning in the woods.

So, how will we accomplish this Dream? Where do I start?

1. We have hired a new Camp Director, Tasha Gillum, who is proving to have what it will take to lead the camp into the future. She brings us over a decade of experience working in outdoor and environmental education. She was born in VA and is a graduate of Sweet Briar College. She holds a master's degree in experiential education from Minnesota State University. She has served as the director of Sweet Briar Outdoor Program. She has served on the Teton Science Schools, and was program coordinator of the University of Nevada's Outdoor Adventure Program. She has distinguished herself by completing a south-bound through-hike of the Appalachian Trail. We are very lucky to have Tasha leading the future of the property.
2. We are developing a Children's Discovery Park. Toward this end we have identified a 2.5-acre area that will be dedicated to giving very young children their first taste of adventure and discovery in nature.
3. We are developing the structure of our environmental programs for elementary age children. We have seen great interest in these programs from the schools and early learning centers.
4. We are attracting new younger members to the camp Board of Directors. In a way, this is the early stages of the changing of the guard as far as leadership of the camp is concerned. Many of the older board members will stay on the board, but this is clearly a shift to re-energize the camp leadership with new young blood.
5. We are exploring the possibility of purchasing the property we know as Camp Kum-Ba-Yah from Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship. We are in the very earliest discussions about this possibility. Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship has agreed in concept to sell Camp Kum-Ba-Yah the land associated with the camp over a five-year period of time. Much work needs to be done to finalize the details.
6. We are developing a plan to meet the future financial needs of the camp. All the above is in preparation for the launch of a major capital campaign designed to bring in the funds necessary to purchase the property and make significant improvements in the facilities associated with the camp.

We can see the purchase of the land and its conversion into a permanent conservancy to protect the future of Bev's dream and would allow us to expand into a year-round facility that would become a destination for all young children in our community.

This is a big dream. However, when you think about it, it is many ways Bev Cosby's original dream for the property.

We must trust in the future, we must have faith, like Bev, that this dream is possible with God's help. Often, we must step out in faith to accomplish what seems impossible.

What is being planned will provide Lynchburg with an important new asset for its children. I would like to see what we are doing becoming a model for communities around the nation. We can take Bev's dream to a new level with God's help, a plan, and hard work.

May God be with us as we go forward in faith.

So..." Where will the Children Play ... ?

They will Play in Cosby Woods!