



# DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

*The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia • Orthodox Church in America*

## St. Tikhon's Summer Camp

The 2025 season of St. Tikhon's Summer Camp was held from June 30th-July 6th. A total of 142 overnight plus 12 day campers ages 7-17 came from across the country (and various jurisdictions) to participate in the program. One family even joined us all the way from Alaska! Our hard-working staff of 59 adult volunteers along with approximately ten priests helped make the event a success once again.

Our theme for the week was on being a Living Temple! Our youth education program was assembled under the direction of Dan Peck, with His Eminence, Archbishop Mark and Anna Marie Black consulting. Impressive contributions to the educational program came from Elizabeth Clause, John Heitzenrater, Samuel Regen, and last but not least, Matushka Masha Solak.

Rev. Timothy Hojnicky was present as the Youth Chaplain for the week. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon also visited with the campers this year, and His Eminence, Archbishop Mark participated the entire week. Ginger Smith and Dimitri Ressetar led the kitchen staff with Elizabeth Clause who ensured our campers with allergies had appropriate meals!

In addition to field games, boating, swimming, and arts & crafts, campers also had the opportunity to engage in gym activities, dancing classes (Sylvia Bachinsky and David Peck with a guest appearance from Fr. Kirill Zawatski). And the older campers had the opportunity to serve as backup counselors--they were a massive help with our youngest campers!

The 2025 session will take place June 29th - July 5th. Registration for campers and counselors will begin mid February at [accounts.doepa.org](https://accounts.doepa.org).

### **A Special Request: Please Encourage Adult Volunteers**

This past year we piloted a One Day Volunteer plan with great success: not every parishioner can give an entire week of time, but coming and helping out in the kitchen for a day frees up our full-week volunteers to engage with the campers as much as possible! We are going to continue to do that. Additionally, if your parish can donate food (snacks, pierogies, or anything else), that helps us invest as much of our budget as possible into the campers!

In Christ, Dan Peck

## Teen Retreats

In February of 2024 the youth of the diocese (and some invited from outside of the diocese) were given the opportunity to come to the first Teen Winter Retreat we have held in years. It was held at Refreshing Mountain near Lancaster, PA and was overseen by Archbishop Mark and we had Father Vjekoslav as chaplain. The theme of the weekend was "A Leap of Faith" and the teens were taught and brought in on discussion of what their faith looks

like, how to live it out, a brief discussion on the sacraments, and how we should pray. There were also many activities, such as zip-lining, escape room, a fire pit night, impromptu kickball, and a giant swing, which our very own Archbishop participated in. Counting leaders/staff there were about 70 attendees.

Because of the success of the Winter Retreat and the ongoing interest in continuing to meet up after another amazing Summer Camp, in the Fall of 2024 the Archbishop blessed us to host the inaugural Teen Fall Retreat at Camp Hebron in Halifax, PA. Over 80 attended including leaders. The theme was "Becoming an Orthodox Christian Adult" and the sessions focused on how we can grow from being children, to teens, to adults, the way God would have us. This inspired more question and answer sessions which were welcomed by our staff. Father Vjekoslav again was chaplain and Reader Samuel Regan led the teen choir. The Divine Liturgy was served and from the reading of the hours, to the choir, all the way to the dismissal, the teens were given many responsibilities to aid in participating and executing the Liturgy. Archbishop Mark commented "it became THEIR Liturgy" and it was the highlight of the weekend. The activities consisted of rock climbing, hiking, archery, a petting zoo at the farm, and team-building games.

This year at the end of January and beginning of February (Jan 31-Feb 2) during the weekend of the Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord at the Temple we will be hosting our 2nd run of the Winter Retreat at Refreshing Mountain. The theme is "Meeting the Lord" and the discussions and sessions will focus on teens owning their faith - not merely following their parent's commands (which is also important). So far the numbers are close to last year but there may be some more that trickle through last minute to break last year's record.

The youth see how much this diocese cares for them. These Teen Retreats have brought many comments from parents and teens acknowledging the work this diocese does for the youth and many have reached out to show their gratitude for all the scholarships. The Diocese of DC has even committed to it on a small scale. The Light of Christ is shown to our youth as we continue to produce good events for them where they also participate in the Divine Services.

In Christ,

Patrick O'Leary