

# Report on the 2008 Family Camp

*by Elie Rizk*

The Sunday school youth group of 2008 departed St. Nicholas Church en route to this year's recreational camp/retreat at Mt. Morton lodge. In a traditional fashion, we left our blessed Church with the blessings and well-wishes of parents and parishioners, in particular those of Fr. Dimitri who prayed for our group's safe arrival and return.

The festivities and a time to associate as well as socialize began immediately on board the bus as we traveled toward the lodge for not only the youth and young children, but also for those parents who accompanied us on this trip. In the traditional Orthodox spirit, we united under God as a family, in the true spirit of unity that St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church holds. Despite the rain, our spirits were high, and upon our arrival, the weather conditions eased, only to embolden the meaning of faith in God and the reason of this camp.

Excitement grew among the participants of the retreat, young and old, as we settled in to our first night together. Jokes were shared and laughter became contagious. As fast as we reached dinner, it was diminished even faster as hungry stomachs and eagerness to begin the activities grew. The retreat was kicked off with a bang as we competed in numerous games and social activities that brought many smiles and many moments to savour. Beginning with the famous hockey competition, we battled away, chanting, cheering and singing songs such as footy anthems which had no association to the game. Following hockey were group-based games which sharpened teamwork and taught us the essence of unity and friendship, while also setting some competitive rivalries. The entirety of the camp was absorbed into these fun-filled games. As we headed for our cabins to end a night to remember, the children and older youth continued to socialize and genuinely have a good time within their cabins until they could not laugh or joke anymore.

A warm, sunny Saturday dawned upon us, and there were signs of laughter-based hangovers as the Sunday School group slowly crawled their way to breakfast in the hall. We ate a wholesome meal, made and contributed by all Sunday school teachers and mothers of children in the Sunday school group who throughout the camp served filling and hearty meals which they cannot be thanked enough for. Beyond breakfast was an entire day of planned group discussion and talks, games and free time. We began with group talks and activities, where we split into three: Young children, Middle-Teen, and Adult. Each session was aimed at the attendees' level of understanding.

The middle-teen group spoke on matters of conflict resolution with parents and were enlightened on the continuous flow of conflict where positions of the persecutor, resolver/rescuer and victim revolved in situations where there was no

understanding and mediation. Followed by this discussion, the middle-teen group was involved in a session with Fr. Themis who presented a documentary he made about the situation in Sierra Leone, and encouraged us to be gracious and thanksgiving for what we are given, and how we must follow the path that God sets for us. While this was being discussed, the young children's group were taught on the fruits of the Spirit

Seriousness set aside, we returned to action-packed games where the Sunday Schoolers faced off in a Treasure Hunt, volleyball and tug of war. We roamed around the site searching for clues in a bid to reach the end of the hunt, strategised and chanted as we played volleyball, tumbled over and made excuses as we pulled the rope in opposite directions. For young children, they displayed a strength that many of the middle-teens did not expect. While it was slightly embarrassing and funny to lose to young children, we attempted to compete against the adults and lost again. However the Sunday Schoolers still earned the winners prizes, which kept them smiling. We were given the opportunity to wander the site and make use of the resources around us before lunch and dinner. Some chose to play on the trampoline, basketball and volleyball courts, while others enjoyed kick to kick with the football on the mini-oval. The group also increased as family members arrived to join in the fun, with some of the adults competing in controversial games of backgammon.

From here, the Sunday school group continued to roam the retreat between meals until we settled at night. A DVD was placed for the younger children in the evening, and a handball game was also set up, which saw many participate.

Sunday morning, we returned to the essence of the camp as we participated in a Divine Liturgy as per usual in the hall held by Fr. John. The choir was led by Ziad Baroudi and Reg Bussell who were also accompanied by some of the youth, which was an promising sight for the future.

This ended what was an enlightening and exciting experience which was a privilege to be shared with the youth and adults of St. Nicholas Church. This retreat joined both the spirit of Orthodoxy and the general chance for all to share in a joyful time which will be remembered and continued annually.