

Letter from the Interim Director

Dear Friends of Shrine Mont Camps,

Shrine Mont Camps is one of the Diocese of Virginia's most valuable assets, forming faith, friendships, and leadership in ways that ripple far beyond the mountain. The **profound impact of camp on the spiritual lives of young people cannot be overstated** — it is a place where for decades children and youth encounter God's love in transformative ways, build lifelong community, and discern their gifts for ministry and service.

The 2024–2025 program year for Shrine Mont Camps **was a season of transition, growth, and renewal**. Following the August 2024 resignation of previous Shrine Mont Camps Director, James Williams, **Ministry Architects was engaged** to provide operational support while the Diocese of Virginia searched for a new director. Recognizing camp needed leadership for 2025 without further delay, **Bishop Stevenson appointed Mary Beth Abplanalp, as Interim Director of Shrine Mont Camps** while the search continued.

What follows is a reflection on how we responded to the **seven major challenges named in the 2024 Shrine Mont Camps Assessment Report** and the outcomes of the summer 2025 camping season.

By the Numbers – 2025 Season

452 campers served – up from **404** last year (**12% increase**)

27 St. Nicholas Day Camp participants

78 paid staff – including **19 chaplains** and **11 nurses & infirmery counselors**

20 volunteers at St. Elizabeth's Camp

\$76,329 in scholarships awarded

1. Camper Numbers & Participation

This summer we offered 8 camps, totalling 22 sessions, that served **452 campers**, a **12% increase** over 2024, with several sessions reaching capacity and last-minute registrations filling open spots.

Accessibility to participation was expanded for campers and staff. The addition of **St. Nicholas Day Camp, providing onsite childcare for young children of camp staff, was utilized by 8 members of the**

camp's professional staff--nurses, chaplains, and directors. An impressive **\$76,329 in scholarships** were distributed to families to reduce financial burden.

2. Camper & Family Experience

Families experienced a smoother process thanks to website upgrades, a **streamlined registration process**, improved communication, and a **completely revised Family Handbook** with clear expectations and pre-arrival guidance.

Opening days at camp were more welcoming, staff were visible and ready to help, and ongoing communications — including photo updates and 2-Day letters — strengthened family trust and connection. We also continued our **partnership with Sacred Playgrounds** to gather longitudinal parent feedback. **2025 results, expected soon, will help guide decisions for 2026.**

3. Program Quality & Faith Formation

In 2025, we worked intentionally to **restore faith formation to the heart of camp.** With **19 chaplains** present across the summer, worship talks, and nightly feeling Check reflections provided a consistent spiritual rhythm. Camp staff were commissioned by Bishop Stevenson at the start of the summer and supported by staff chaplains throughout the season.

Recreational programming was also strengthened: **St. George's Session 4** saw the **return of beloved 3-day canoeing and hiking trips**, and **glamping experiences** were quite popular at St. Elizabeth's and Lil's Camp, reconnecting campers with the outdoors and beloved traditions.

4. Staffing Sustainability

This year we recruited **78 staff** and **20 volunteers**, including **11 nurses and infirmity counselors**, and hired **two nurse co-coordinators** to ensure every camper's health needs were addressed with excellence. We also made **strategic staffing adjustments** to place our strongest leaders at campsites working directly with campers, strengthening daily leadership where it matters most.

Leadership transitions were handled with care: **Greg Randall was appointed as the next Director of Shrine Mont Camps**, attended Family Camp with his family, and spent several weeks on the mountain to immerse himself in camp culture and orient to the complexities of a large ministry.

Collaboration with **Shrine Mont Inc. leadership, Kevin and Mary Moomaw**, began in the spring and continued all season, aligning camp operations with facility support.

Behind the scenes, **Katie Creasey** and **Chelsea Setzer** provided the equivalent of one full-time position in administrative support and registration. Their work has been essential to this year's progress and will continue to support Greg in the future.

Looking ahead, Greg will work with camp directors for a more efficient and collaborative **hiring process** so we can offer summer staff positions earlier and secure high-quality staff for 2026.

5. Operations, Finance & Transparency

Extensive work took place with the **Finance Office** this year to improve efficiency and streamline processes. We created a **scholarship committee** to review and approve requests, nearly eliminated paper checks, and moved to a **fully digital payment process** for faster, more transparent transactions.

The **Family Handbook, Nursing Handbook, and Staff Handbook** were all revised, strengthening safety, clarity, and consistency for staff and families. **All of these documents and processes are now captured in a digital field guide, providing a central resource for future reference and ensuring long-term sustainability.**

While significant progress was made in camp operations, **leadership will continue reviewing and refining these processes to ensure ongoing efficiency and effectiveness** as we plan for future camp seasons.

6. Inclusion & Diversity

Feedback from the assessment process noted that while many experience Shrine Mont Camps as a welcoming place, **it is not yet equally welcoming to all** — particularly for our queer siblings and for people of color. This year, our **gender inclusion practices were revised in consultation with Queer Clergy Cohort members, parents of queer children, and non-binary staff**, reaffirming our commitment to a camp where everyone is welcomed as a beloved child of God.

We recognize that staff and camper diversity is still not where we want it to be. Expanded scholarships and targeted outreach were important first steps, and leadership is committed to additional investment in these areas to build a more inclusive and representative camp community in 2026 and beyond.

7. Communication & Trust

At **Bishop Stevenson's** call and with his **active participation**, a **formal reconciliation process** took place throughout 2025, facilitated by **the Rev. Richard Blackburn of Thinking Systems Ministry**. Participants have reported a renewed sense of peace and unity, laying the groundwork for a healthier and more collaborative future. This was a healthy and important first step for the diocese to take, while recognizing that the pace of healing occurs differently for every individual.

Communication with families and parishes improved this year through email responsiveness, consistent social media updates, website improvements, and professional photo and video coverage. Visits to the mountain from **Bishop Stevenson, Bishop Gulick, Canon Ricardo Sheppard, and Mark Eastham** further strengthened trust and confidence in diocesan support for Shrine Mont Camps.

Looking Ahead

The future of Shrine Mont Camps is bright! Greg Randall's time on the mountain this summer has equipped him with a deep understanding of the ministry's culture and rhythms, positioning him to lead confidently into the next chapter of Shrine Mont Camps. In 2026, extra attention will be given to expanded marketing efforts to increase camper enrollment, deepen parish partnerships throughout the diocese, and intentionally reach underrepresented minority groups.

A new **leadership body** will be developed to collaborate with the camp director, articulate a shared vision for the ministry, and share responsibility for maintaining camp's infrastructure — freeing the director to focus on programming, staff training, and camper experience.

The recent creation of the **Canon for Discipleship position**, now held by **the Rev. Canon Ricardo Sheppard**, adds diocesan support and focus to formation efforts across the diocese, including youth ministry initiatives that will inevitably bolster the camp program.

It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as interim director. I could not have done it without the incredible team on the mountain this summer. These salt of the earth people are doing God's work and have my unending respect and gratitude. I also commend Bishop Stevenson and Mark Eastham for their deep commitment, ongoing investment, and hope-filled vision for Shrine Mont Camps.

Greg Randall is called and ready to do incredible things with this ministry. This job is enormous! I encourage all of you to hold him, diocesan leadership, and our summer camp staff in your prayers, and seek ways you can engage with and support the ministry of Shrine Mont Camps.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Abplanalp