The year 2017 was another amazing year where our LORD continues to use this place for Faith, Education, and Renewal opportunities in HIS creation for all of HIS people. Our summer kicked off with a fun filled Memorial Day weekend as over 120 people gathered to celebrate our 60th Anniversary where the Bishops from all three Synod's (VA, DC Metro & WV/Western Maryland) were able to participate. The highlights included a wonderful worship service at the ST John's Chapel in the spring field, camp games and activities, a formal dinner, and a closing time-capsule ceremony. We are so grateful for the continued out pour of love and grace that our ministry partners, neighbors, friends and staff give back to Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp and Retreat Center.

This place continues to shape the faith life of so many through retreat groups, youth groups, summer campers, and staff. Again this year we have one more summer staff counselor that has enrolled into a Seminary Program and will move to Minnesota in the Fall of 2018 after a final summer here as a senior counselor. He joins three others already enrolled at Union Seminary and will be the 50th member of our staff that has answered the "Call to Ministry" after spending many years here discovering the power of outdoor ministry. This is truly a place where anyone at any age can discover the awe of nature and the power of the spirit in each one of us. There are too many stories and God Moments that are experienced here to name them all but I have attempted to highlight a few of my favorites below.

A six year old camper was walking down the lake road for an afternoon swim session with her counselor. As they got closer to the waterfront and surrounded by the pine grove the camper stopped and asked "*How do you know God is real?"* Her counselor knelt down on one knee and pointed out the beauty of the shimmering water, the sound of the creek nearby, the comfort provided by the shade of the pine trees, and the animals scurrying around the landscape. Then she told the little girl *"this is how I know God is real"* and the young camper responded with a big smile and a resounding "*you are exactly right*"!

An 18 year old freshman in college that applied to be a summer counselor here for ten weeks has wanted to be a counselor since she was 5 years old after attending family camp. During her interview she was posed with the question about why she wanted to be a counselor that requires so much more work and less pay than most summer jobs. She quickly responded that Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp and Retreat Center fully shaped her appreciation of the outdoors and even helped form her career path in Natural Resources. She went on to say that she found her faith and courage while attending summer camps and it helped her make good decisions her first year at college by getting involved in campus ministry, community action, and support services. She concluded with how her outdoor ministry background makes it easy to "explain the gospel to young children by breaking it down into simple languages and examples of the power of nature.

It's just hard to explain the feeling of comfort and reduced stress that we all feel when we traverse into Fort Valley and drive through the gates of Caroline Furnace. God welcomes us all

here and some even believe that HE has sanctified this place to celebrate his love and grace. Come join us and celebrate HIS creation in your Outdoor Ministry.