

1,200 Miles to Camp Shiloh Lutheran Retreat

Every year someone asks me “Why do you drive 1,200 miles with teenagers just to attend some summer camp? Aren’t there any closer camps?” Yes, there are. But, Camp Shiloh is not just some summer camp. We happily make the two-day, three-state trek in two 15 passenger “mini-busses”. In fact, next year I might have to take three mini busses (over 30 people connected to CrossWalk came to camp this year). There is a reason I’ve brought teens and adults from CrossWalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ to Drive Teen Camp at Camp Shiloh for the past 4 years in a row. Rather, I should say there are *many* reasons.

We come because of the *people*. We come because of the *place*. We come because of the *program*.

The people who run a summer camp are the single biggest factor between a wonderful camp experience and a not so wonderful camp experience. At Camp Shiloh, we run it. In fact, we run all of it. By “we” I mean members of our WELS church body. The South Central District of the WELS pooled resources to purchase the camp in 2000. Therefore, we have complete control over every aspect of the camp, which is not the case for most summer camps. By God’s grace, the people he has placed directly in charge of the camp are hard-working, humble leaders with a passion to spread the gospel via the camp. It’s nice to know I share the same faith with leaders of the camp and that I can trust them with the lives and souls of the teens I’m in charge of. When I go to Camp Shiloh I can focus on the teens. The camp has a super friendly staff that takes care of the registration, cooking, cleaning, maintenance, and anything else we need help with.

Camp Shiloh is quite an experience, but it’s also quite a place. The facilities impressed me from the first time I visited the camp. There are multiple cabins and suites, a large conference center with dorm rooms, a dining hall, sand volleyball court, basketball court, playing fields, a pavilion and a large campfire area. Every building is air-conditioned. The grounds are meticulously maintained. However, the highlight of the camp’s location is the lake. Camp Shiloh sits on Lake Bob Sandlin in northeast Texas. The lake provides endless opportunities for fun: swimming, canoeing, boating, tubing, skiing, and fishing. The camp provides all of the equipment.

The true test of a camp is whether campers return. Five years ago roughly 35 teens attended Drive Teen Camp. The past two years we’ve doubled that number. My teens keep wanting to return. That’s because Camp Shiloh offers a solid, well-rounded program that is centered on Christ. Teens grow closer to Jesus and to each other. Each day we have several interactive Bible study sessions in large and small groups. Over 16 adults lead different aspects of the studies. We plan dozens of group activities, sports, and team-builders. There is a good mix of structure and flexibility. Teens love the amount of free-time they have to choose exactly what they want to do. The program allows teens to foster relationships with

each other and with the counselors. The teens open up about their struggles and they're challenged and comforted with God's words and promises.

I'll continue to bring a group from Phoenix as long as I'm able. I encourage you to send the teens from your church and invite them to bring their friends to camp—especially their unchurched friends! Camp Shiloh has the potential to reach even more teens for Christ. Texas is a big state and it takes a long time to get to the camp. But, I'm confident you and the teens you send will have the same reaction that I did. You'll want to return and bring more people with you.

