



Children play a round of the game Duck, Duck, Goose.

indoors

Their camp looked like an old-time wagon train encampment, without the wagons of course. They had pulled their circle closed with campers, trailers, and tents. But at 11 o'clock in the morning the campsites were deserted. Everyone had gathered under the pavilion in the center of the grounds. There they hugged each other exclaiming, "The Lord be praised" and "Peace be with you."

Why such a happening? Mass was being celebrated and the participants wished to express their Christian love for each other. As one man put it, "We are all part of one big family." That big family comprised 15 counselors and 18 families, 84 people in all. They had traveled from as far as Ithaca and as near as Hornell for family campers week at Skybrook Campgrounds in Dansville. Staff member Paul Hoysic described the week as "an experience in Christian community."

After the hugging, the big family divided into its individual families to receive Communion. Father Robert Hammond, who celebrated the Mass and directs the renewal camping venture, explained that family camp helps strengthen Christian families. "A Christian family is where love, trust, acceptance, forgiveness, and a sense of humor are."

Not all families who came to one of the two weeks of family camp this summer are part of other renewal groups. Some, Father Hammond said, just came looking for a different type of camping experience. "Camping is what these families do normally. Here the Christian element is added," he stressed.

Many are drawn to camp for spiritual reasons. Robert Seymour, a veteran of former years said, "I look forward to it." Another man, a convert who called himself an "infant Christian" said that he was really profiting from the sessions. A fourteen-year-old boy who came with his family the first week and stayed to work the second, said that his family is now closer to God and that he respects his parents more.

Mass ended and the children drifted off with counselors while adults split into groups. Father Hammond reported that the theme of the Bible study hour was the coming of Christ prophesied in the Old Testament and his coming in the lives of his followers.

Each group found a spot: down by the fish pond, at a picnic table in the woods, on a grassy hill, in the shade of a trailer. One group discussed Abraham's journey to the promised land, another held hands and prayed. Tots sang. A group of adults was intent on a discussion of family life.

After two hours of study the groups gradually began to break and families headed back to their campsites for lunch. Counselors joined families for lunch as they do for each meal. Father Hammond described the group of teens as "hand-picked." He added that they would have to be, in order to get along living so closely. "It's one thing with a bathroom, but in a tent!" he joked.

During lunch that contagiously easy pace well known to campers crawled through camp. Folks lingered at the table chatting. Kids meandered down to the pool.

Father Hammond said that dinner would probably not start until around 7 p.m. A bonfire and time for family sharing would highlight the evening.

"There will be tears at the end of the week when it's time to say good-by," he predicted.



Fathers take the Sacred Species to distribute to their families.



Tom and Jean Cass share Communion with their children and a counselor.



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