

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

CAMPS BERNADETTE AND FATIMA CELEBRATE DECADES OF FAITH AND FUN

By Andrew Thibault | Photos by Brendan Stackhouse



Campers gather for Mass every Sunday and every other Wednesday at Camps Bernadette and Fatima.

Lucy Watkins of Whitefield came to Camp Bernadette nervous and shy, but the 8-year-old left independent, outgoing and much more responsible, according to her mom, Abigail.



Lucy Watkins, 8

“Lucy’s faith grew stronger along with her self-esteem,” Watkins said. “The positive changes we have seen in our daughter are miraculous.”

For decades, Camp Bernadette for Girls in Wolfeboro and Camp Fatima for Boys in Gilmanton have provided opportunities for children like Lucy to have fun and grow in faith, confidence and friendship each summer.

Last year, Camp Bernadette hosted alumnae from all generations and celebrated 70 years with activities, Mass, dinner and a bonfire. Similar things are planned this year to celebrate Camp Fatima’s 75th anniversary and the 45th anniversary of Special Needs Week (SNW).

When explaining the rationale behind creating Catholic camps for boys and girls, Bishop Matthew F. Brady, Bishop of Manchester from 1944-1959, said, “We, as Catholics, are interested in the development of the complete man, physically, mentally and spiritually. That is why Catholics have taken camping as a church activity. Since Catholicism is not merely a form of belief, but rather a way of life, its atmosphere should pervade every activity of life, which includes recreation.”

While the world is a different place than it was when the camps first opened their cabin doors, the years haven’t dimmed interest in both destinations or in the mission Bishop Brady articulated.

Camps Bernadette and Fatima regularly attract hundreds of children every summer. Last year, between June and August, the camps hosted more than 1,200 children from 25 states and eight countries between June and August.

Additionally, Camp Fatima hosted 150 children and adults with special needs during SNW in June.

In order to offer dozens of activities in an overnight setting, Bernadette and Fatima adhere to rigorous safety policies and procedures. Both camps are accredited by the American Camping Association and are regulated by the state Department of Health and Human Services.

Both camps have infirmaries staffed with nurses on site around the clock. Where activities require, all counselors must have professional certifications to ensure they are run properly and safely, and all staff and volunteers must undergo background checks and maintain up-to-date safe environment training.



SCENES FROM CAMP



| GROWING IN SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

For many campers, returning to Bernadette and Fatima every summer is the highlight of their year. Mary Croteau of Salem, mother of 30-year-old Jean-Luc Croteau, a long-time SNW camper, says he looks forward to it every year.

“Special Needs Week at Fatima is his vacation,” says Croteau, principal of St. Joseph Regional Catholic School in Salem. “Jean Luc takes a week off from work and enjoys his independence and the reunion with all his friends and counselors.”

The camps’ Executive Director Budd Ryer says families choose Camp Fatima and Camp Bernadette for several reasons, but chief among them are superior offerings that take place in a joyful, Catholic community with a strong sense of belonging.

“Children can enjoy engaging action-packed activities and live out their faith knowing that each person is recognized as a beautiful child of God,” Ryer says.

The camps offer over 50 activities at each location, including swimming lessons, boating, ropes courses, rock wall climbing, basketball, tennis, archery, team sports, arts and crafts, cookouts, campfires and competitions.

These programs challenge campers to try new things and become more confident in their skills, while learning to be better teammates, according to Ryer.

“Simultaneously, they also advance the Catholic faith through the daily exercise of prayer, the celebration of Mass, faith formation, adoration, the rosary club, reconciliation and retreats,” Ryer explains.



| FOCUSING ON FAITH FORMATION

In 2022, the camps reinvigorated their chaplaincy program to increase their ability to promote the Catholic faith and fulfill their mission.

Father Chris Martel, the pastor at St. Catherine of Siena in Manchester, was appointed the first Head Chaplain for the camps. Father Martel works with three or four other priests to offer Mass, hear confessions and minister to the needs of campers and staff.

“One of the great gems of beauty in our Diocese is the continuation of the Catholic tradition at Camps Bernadette and Camp Fatima,” says Father Martel. “I am always amazed at the number of campers and staff who stop in the chapel to pray, come to adoration or go to rosary club. The camps are filled with great joy.”



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BISHOP MATTHEW F. BRADY, BISHOP OF MANCHESTER 1944-1959



Anna Gaby

The camps also employ faith formation directors each summer to support the chaplains and bring everyone closer to Christ. One of those was Anna Gaby of Concord, who served as the Faith Formation Director at Camp Bernadette in 2023.

Campers are encouraged to have discussions about faith and humanity, ask questions and spend time in reflection, according to Gaby.

"Camp allows staff and campers alike to see their faith in a new light by finding God in the everyday activities that bring so much joy," says Gaby.

| BECOMING A SECOND HOME

While much of the focus on camp relates to the program offerings and faith formation, at the very core of the camper experience is cabin life.

Campers live in groups of 10 to 15, allowing them to focus on developing their interpersonal skills, according to Ryer.

"The cabin setting provides ample opportunity for campers to connect on a deeper level, sharing their experiences and supporting one another through the ups and downs of camp life," explains the executive director.

He noted that cabin life provides counselors the opportunity to impart life lessons, like caring for belongings and the cabin, treating others with respect and resolving conflicts in a healthy way.

Camper Cooper Albee of Suncook described cabin life at Camp Fatima as a welcoming, fun-filled environment.

"Everyone is like one big family," the 14-year-old says. "There are many opportunities to step out of your comfort zone and make great friendships. I love the Catholic environment and the opportunities to receive the Sacraments."

"Camp Fatima is my second home," his brother Jack, 12, notes.



Cooper Albee, 14

ABOUT THE CAMPS

The camps function as a **501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization**, separately incorporated and governed by a board of directors appointed by the Bishop of Manchester.

The camps operate as one financially independent, self-sustaining organization **funded through tuition income and donations**.

Infirmaries at both camps are staffed with **nurses on site all day, every day**.

The camps gather in person once a week for "**Bernie Fatima Day**" to enjoy activities, Mass, dinner and dances together.

All staff and volunteers are required to undergo **background checks** and maintain up-to-date **safe environment training**.

Both camps are accredited by the **American Camping Association** and are regulated by the **New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services**.

For more information, contact Andrew Thibault at andrew@bfcamp.com or 603-931-5500 x114.

SCENES FROM CAMP



According to Ryer, campers have been known to forge authentic, lifelong friendships that enrich the camp experience and also provide a valuable source of social support and connection throughout childhood and into adulthood.

| LINGERING LIFE LESSONS

No one can attest to that more than David Thibault, the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Manchester. Thibault has been a camper, counselor, parent of nine campers and now serves as chairman of the board of directors.

“Children learn skills of negotiation, fair play, communication and how to survive without cellphones at Bernadette and Fatima,” he says. “The true beauty, however, is the immersion into a joyful community where campers grow in faith, confidence and friendship.”

Thibault once asked a counselor who attended Camp Fatima for many summers why he loved camp and the response has stuck with him.

“He said, ‘Camp is the only place where I can be my true self. I am accepted and loved for who I am,’” Thibault recalls. “What a beautiful testimony to the unconditional love God has for each one of us.”

It’s one of the reasons why campers like Lucy Watkins can’t wait to come back every year.

“I loved all of it,” Lucy says, “but most of all, I liked meeting new friends.” ■

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

9 FULL TIME STAFF

200 summer staff

150 CAMPERS AT SPECIAL NEEDS WEEKS

664 CAMPERS AT BERNADETTE

528 CAMPERS AT FATIMA

\$2,050 tuition per two-week session

\$850 TUITION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS WEEK

2024 SCHEDULE

SUMMER SESSIONS

SESSION 1
(AGES 6-15)
June 23 - July 6
\$2,050

STARTER WEEK
(AGES 5-10)
June 23 - June 29
\$1,025

SESSION 2
(AGES 6-15)
July 7 - July 20
\$2,050

SESSION 3
(AGES 6-15)
July 21 - Aug. 3
\$2,050

SESSION 4
AT BERNADETTE
(AGES 6-15)
Aug. 4 - Aug. 17
\$2,050

SESSION 4 AT
FATIMA (AGES 6-15)
Aug. 4 - Aug. 10
\$1,025

SPECIAL SESSIONS

SPECIAL NEEDS WEEK
AT FATIMA (AGES 9 AND
ABOVE, CO-ED)
June 9 - June 14
\$850

EXCEPTIONAL CITIZENS
WEEK AT FATIMA (CO-ED)
Aug. 11 - Aug. 17
Free



*Active New Hampshire Catholic parishioners are eligible for a 15% discount on tuition.



Looking for a rewarding summer job? Now hiring for Special Needs Week, Camp Bernadette and Camp Fatima.



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