

Texas Baptist camps continue ministry during pandemic

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The financial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been tough, but Texas Baptist camps have modified programs and implemented new safety measures to keep campers as safe as possible.

The Texas Baptist Missions Foundation launched a fundraising campaign and set up its [Camp Relief Fund](#) to help Texas Baptist camps stay open and continue to reach people for Christ.

‘We’re all about flexibility’

Rhonda Roberts, director of Heart of Texas Baptist Camp & Conference Center, explained the camp where she serves is at about 10 percent of its usual calendar capacity for the summer. The encampment is a rental facility, meaning it does not run the programs. So, each camp program is determined by the association or church organizing it, not the encampment.



A group of girls wash their hands between activities as part of the new safety protocol at Heart of Texas Baptist Camp & Conference Center.

Heart of Texas Camp has been able to host two camps this summer, and Roberts has seen a slight increase in churches coming to the encampment to host their own small summer camps instead of participating in large, collaborative events.

New cleaning protocols included increased sanitization of dorms and handwashing stations. Roberts explained that camps are flexible and willing to work within the parameters set up by the governor's office.

"At camp, we're all about flexibility. Just give us the rules and we'll abide by them," she said. "We're working under the governor's standards and protocols for operating a camp. Those standards include adding handwashing stations, hand sanitizer all around the camp and spraying a disinfectant daily in the dorms and bathrooms. We're encouraging adult counselors to bring Clorox wipes and wipe down the rooms additionally. We check temperatures every day and have a quarantine cabin if necessary."

To Roberts, keeping the camp open in any capacity possible is an important way to continue making an impact on the lives of the people who stay there.

“So many people have accepted Christ at camp, or have been called to ministry, or meet their spouse. God uses camps. Big life events happen here,” Roberts said. “It’s really important for people to get away from their normal routine. When people get away they can get a new perspective and give God time to speak. People just hear God differently at camp.”

Lives changed at RA camps

God is transforming the lives of boys across Texas through Royal Ambassador summer camps, Texas Baptist Men leaders said.

Several Baptist associations in counties where COVID cases are few have held regional Royal Ambassador summer camps with more to come. Conducted within the protocols Gov. Greg Abbott issued, the camps provided an environment where boys could grow closer to God and learn more about how he is working around the globe.

Ministering to smaller groups, camps safely have been able to feature a full range of activities, including archery, water sports and fishing as well as missionaries and worship services. The camps are being helped by TBM State Staffers, high school Challengers who take on leadership roles at the various camps across the state.

“In many ways, COVID-19 created an opportunity for each camp to look at what it’s been doing and make adjustments to make sure they are focused on maturing boys spiritually in a safe manner,” said Alan Huesing, TBM State Royal Ambassador and Challengers director.

“This summer, young men are growing in their relationships with the Lord.

They're discovering how they can serve him. We are blessed that there have been zero cases of COVID. God is still transforming lives in the midst of this pandemic."

Mark Clemons, who helped lead RA camps at Alto Frio Baptist Encampment and in Hempstead, said meaningful spiritual discussions are taking place during camps. Boys want to know more about God and grow in their faith.

"There were some good conversations," he said. "They got to do some things they've probably never done before."

More than 100 commitments to Christ so far

Mike Wilson, CEO of Latham Springs, explained the success of small camps—such as those operated for Royal Ambassador—are why Texas Baptist encampments are continuing to stay open. At Latham Springs, more than 100 students already have made commitments to Christ this summer.

"You never know where these kids would be spiritually if they hadn't come to camp," he said. "Even though our numbers have been down, it's amazing to see what God has done in our camps. God is so much bigger than COVID."

"We provide an environment where kids can get away and be surrounded by people devoted to establishing and strengthening their relationship with the Lord."

Even though numbers may be down this year, Wilson and Roberts are focused on keeping the camps open so they can be ready to welcome campers next summer.

Wilson asked churches to pray for camp leaders as they navigate difficult

times.

“Pray for me for wisdom as I lead through all of this,” he said. “But at the end of the day, we know God is in control. And even though there’s a lot of storms brewing, we know the one that controls the storm. COVID didn’t catch God by surprise.”

To contribute to the Camp Relief Fund, click [here](#).

EDITOR’S NOTE: Latham Springs Camp and Retreat Center at Aquilla closed for two weeks and its staff was placed under “house quarantine” after the camp learned about confirmed cases of COVID-19 among members of a church group from Keller. For more information, click [here](#).