

# Walker knows the transformative power of church camp

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CEDAR HILL—Eddie Walker believes camp ministry can be a transformative experience for children and youth as they begin their walk with Christ.

That was the case in his life. And Walker has devoted much of his career to making it meaningful for others.

His experience includes service as a summer staff member, a worship leader, founder of a camp and now as executive director of Mount Lebanon Camp and Retreat Center in Cedar Hill—where he came to faith in Christ.

Growing up in nearby Duncanville, Walker attended camp at Mount Lebanon as a junior high school student at the invitation of a friend.



Eddie Walker, executive director of Mount Lebanon Camp and Retreat Center, stands outside Pecan

Lodge, where—as a 15-year-old camper—he told his youth group he felt called to vocational ministry.  
(Courtesy Photo)

“I went to have fun, ride horses and swim, but I heard the gospel in an age-appropriate way that I could understand and came to Christ then and there,” he said.

A few years later at age 15, Walker responded to the call to ministry and began a deeper involvement in camp ministry.

Returning to Mt. Lebanon in college, he served on summer staff and eventually joined the worship team.

“I grew up playing bluegrass and gospel music,” he said. “When I came back on summer staff, they let me help my first year and then asked me to start leading.”

As a worship leader, Walker saw his own faith journey played out in the lives of young campers.

“I got to see thousands of kids repeat my story where they came to Christ, got plugged into a church home, and made lifelong friends” he said.

## **‘Good to come full circle’**

Walker led worship and handled media for camps before he moved to Rockwall, where he served 12 years on staff at Lake Pointe Church as a worship leader and communications director.

Eventually, he and his family built their own church camp from the ground up in nearby Royse City.

“My dad was a contractor,” Walker said. “He taught me to buy and rent properties and fix them up.”

Walker’s experience taking care of facilities and running media, along with a lifetime in ministry, came together when he developed and directed Sabine Creek Ranch.

Walker and his family ran the camp 17 years, before he moved to Dallas Baptist University to teach a camp degree program in 2014.

From firsthand experience as a camper, staff member and camp director to his time in higher education, Walker has witnessed and understands the impact camp ministry has on the lives of students.

Returning to Mount Lebanon as executive director in the spring of 2022, Walker hopes to continue in leading children and students toward a relationship to Christ through fun, educational and transformational experiences at church camp.

“It’s good to come full circle” he said.

## **‘One of the best evangelistic tools we have’**



Young campers at Mount Lebanon

receive spiritual counsel on the lawn. (Courtesy Photo)

Camps offer families the opportunity to expose their children to the gospel in a fun and understandable way, Walker noted. When many Christians share their testimonies, they often begin at church camp, he observed.

“I do this because it is effective,” Walker said. Camp ministry is “one of the best evangelistic tools that we have.”

Nationally, the Christian Camp and Conference Association 2020 Compass Survey revealed 10 to 15 percent of the 215 responding camps’ overnight camp attendance made faith commitments.

Nearly 9 out of 10 camp encourage faith commitments or recommitments to Christ in their programs, but only 39 percent keep track of those decisions. So, the actual number undoubtedly is greater.

Last year, of the 7,509 summer campers at Mount Lebanon, 327 made recorded professions of faith in Christ, 34 responded to a call to vocational ministry, 76 made a commitment to be baptized, and many others rededicated their lives to Christ.

“We are in a season of rapid growth, anticipating our 2023 summer camp attendance being up almost 25 percent this summer over last year, and an additional 20 percent up for 2024,” Walker said.

Thirty encampments are related to Texas Baptists and supported by associations of churches around the state.

Walker sees “a lot of positive benefits” for a child or teenager who attends a church camp

Camps offer an environment “away from distractions, technology and

sometimes really tough family situations,” Walker said, describing them as a place where young people can “look at the stars and consider bigger questions.”

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