

A Place Set Apart

I've recently been thinking a lot about our society and its desire for isolation. Many prefer to bank, shop, buy groceries, order takeout, and even chat with doctors online. Several people work from home, avoiding coworkers and social settings entirely, and evenings can easily be spent in front of a device. Yet, what we really need, especially as Christ-followers, is face-to-face encounters. There's no replacement for the joy of smiles, handshakes, and hugs. We were created to connect, and our ministries are poised to help people return from isolation and reembrace human interaction while sharing the message of Christ. If we don't stop culture's shift toward an all-online, isolated lifestyle, we're going to end up with a generation engrained with unhealthy behaviors.

Hidden Acres focused on a "return to normal" starting at the beginning of 2021. We had weathered a year of a global shutdown and wanted to become a "place set apart" for people again. Those who were willing to gather showed up in a big way! Many of our programs – retreats, summer camp, and public events – saw a registration surge that either neared pre-COVID numbers or exceeded them altogether. For a people-person like me who has spent a life in hospitality, it was awesome! I greeted groups, met new people, and gave golf cart rides all year long.

Retreats

Our retreats in 2021 felt normal. Most or all COVID restrictions were gone. Events like Men's Retreat, Sportmen's Retreat, Winter Blast, and Family Camp had near-normal attendance, with a few even exceeding 2019 numbers. Rental groups that needed to cancel in 2020 rebooked a weekend in 2021 and arrived on the grounds so excited to be back at Hidden Acres. It was clear to us that many people were fighting society's isolation tendencies and were willing to join us once again. We felt blessed to be a vessel for Christ's message to these children, adults, and families. We just wrapped up Men's Retreat 2022, and Mike Coffman, an EFCA Pastor at Indianola Community Church, shared this quote from a guy attending with his group: *"God has used this retreat to transform my relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as well as with other men. Jesus has impacted my relationship with my wife, my family, my daughter, my church, and my workplace. I truly believe that, without the Men's Retreat at Hidden Acres, I would not be the Christian, husband, father, son, and friend that I currently am."*

Summer Camp

Our summer camp ministry was very successful in 2021. Chris & Marj Clark, members of CrossRidge EFC, have sent their two children to summer camp for years. They summarize Truman's and Ruthie's experiences this way: *"Camp is a special environment where kids gently hear about Jesus, enjoy being outdoors, and play & pray together, all while having summer counselors and adults quickly build relationships and pour into them with the love of Christ. What is really special though is how my children have now transitioned from campers to summer counselors after they turned 16 years old!"* We hope your church is sending children to summer camp and encouraging teens to apply for summer staff. This past summer we felt like parents wanting a camp experience for their children found Hidden Acres. Between our official seven weeks of summer camp and three sessions of traveling Day Camps, we shared Christ with over 3,700 kids. Our 162 summer staff (including Truman and Ruthie!) befriended campers and poured into their lives, resulting in 409 salvations and 185 rededications, or 594 total decisions for Christ. Praise God!

Giving

Our giving is increasing. We realized in the pandemic that without retreat and summer camp income, our giving was not enough to keep us afloat. We started a campaign to encourage churches and individuals to become new

donors or give more than before. Many of you responded in a big way! Thank you for continuing to support the camp and help us maintain a healthy giving base that can carry us through future trials.

A Life Giving Partnership

I hope your churches are seeing the same return as Hidden Acres. I hope your people are fighting the trend to do everything from home. I know I've been encouraged in 2021 as I visited churches. Parking lots are full again, the sweet sound of fellowship rings from foyers, and Biblical teaching and worship booms from sanctuaries. But if you're feeling like people are still staying away, I hope you remember that Hidden Acres is a place set apart for YOU. Reach out to us if you think a summer camp or retreat experience in 2022 might help your families reengage with the church.

I'm excited for our life-giving ministry to partner with and support your life-giving church. Our staff and board would love to see your church family's lives strengthened, restored, transformed, and energized for the Kingdom of God when they visit camp! We're here to help with retreats, summer camps, church visits, cookie baking, and more! Blessings to you this year, and I hope to see you at Hidden Acres soon.

It's a pleasure to serve and minister alongside you!



Executive Director, Hidden Acres Christian Center

