

FIRST WORD

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Fall Fling

By Liesl Pound

I went to my first Fall Fling retreat at Camp Shamineau in the fall of my sixth grade year at twelve years old. It was one of the first activities I ever got to do with the high schoolers in my youth group, and I remember being so excited. Now that I'm older, I get to see the other side of it, hanging out with middle schoolers who I don't get to see as often and getting to connect with them. It's a great activity for our youth group to do together every year, a tradition I very much look forward to.

At Fall Fling there are lots of chances to try new things; like ropes courses, horse back riding, crate stacking, and more. There are lots of sports, chances to bond with your youth group, fight over trophies, and play with and against other churches. Fall Fling has everything from crafts like painting and bracelet making, to more physical activities like rock wall climbing and activities I don't do anywhere else but at Fall Fling; like hay rides, dodge ball tournaments, and crazy games in chapel with water balloons, people hanging from ceilings, and much, much more.

Fall Fling is different from Shamineau's normal summer camp because you get to go with your whole youth group, and get a lot more free time. But maybe my favorite difference is in the worship. Chapel at Shamineau is always fun, but during Fall Fling they pull out all the stops. They hire different Christian bands who give us a whole mini concert, and it's so cool to see all these churches crammed into one chapel, with all of us jumping and singing and praising God. It's during these moments of worship that I really feel God, and the truth of the lyrics I'm singing, and it's really cool to be able to look around and see other people my age feeling him too.

Fall Fling is an exhausting, super fun weekend. And even though some of us come back tired or with colds, for me Fall Fling is a chance to recharge and be encouraged before the long winter months at school where I'm surrounded by social media, gossip, temptations, and everyday struggles like homework and my job. Fall Fling helps me get through the year and reminds me I'm not alone in my faith. I'll always have my youth group, and I know that there are other churches around me, full of kids who also have to go to schools where maybe it's hard to stay positive and share God's love.

I'm so lucky to have a great youth group that goes on awesome retreats like this, and I can't wait for Fall Fling this year!





MomCo at First Free

By Kelsey Burns

First Free has a rich history with MomCo, going back many many years beginning in the fall of 2004. (If this seems confusing, it used to be called MOPS!) MomCo encourages and equips moms to realize their potential as mothers, women, and leaders, in relationship with Jesus and in partnership with the local church. It is a blessing to look around and see the legacy and influence of so many women in our congregation.

We make sure to let people know that all moms are welcome in this Mom Community (MomCo), and we mean it! We treat every woman who shows up with the same dignity, love and welcome that Jesus showed the woman at the well. She couldn't believe that he knew everything she ever did and still offered her faith and eternal life.

Seventy seven percent of moms want deeper friendships, but meeting and making friends is daunting. That's where

MomCo comes in! We know moms want to be part of something, and we are welcoming women to the table who otherwise wouldn't set foot in a church. We focus on connection, belonging, and relationships. We break bread together and share our lives with intentionality. Women are encouraged not to hide the hard stuff, as connection happens best when you share real life.

At MomCo First Free, moms are finding women who are kind, welcoming, understanding, and filled with the hope and certainty of Christ. We have spiritually mature leaders stationed at each table who work to bring the small talk to spiritual talk. We also have mentor moms in our group who offer support and guidance as well as cover our group in prayer. We know that women have a powerful and pivotal role in the shaping of their families' religious lives. Women who come to MomCo are seeing the evidence of a practical true faith and the freedom it brings. We are thrilled to welcome them in and show them what it looks like to live as a follower of Christ.

Our meetings follow a simple formula—food and fun! We take turns bringing food to share with each other. We begin the meetup by eating and catching up with our tables, then we share in an activity or learn from a speaker. In the past, we have had an artist teach a painting class, a nutritionist talk about Guilt Free Child Nutrition, and a fashion influencer share how to focus in on what works for you instead of



chasing trends each season. We have prepped meals together to bring home and share with our families, and have even cleaned out our cars together in the parking lot with music, prizes, and laughter.

Each spring we have a big tea party where a few women share about their life and how God has helped them through. The tea party has been named as a favorite meeting among the women who aren't Christians! People love stories and being known. God is working in this group. Besides our regular meetups, we host moms night outs and regular playdates for moms to connect to one another. Last year we had so much interest in our group from moms that worked traditional hours, we've added a Thursday night group. It runs the same programming as Friday mornings, without childcare, from 7-8:30pm.

To top it all off, we are so blessed to have a vibrant children's ministry here at First Free that provides activities and events that are an easy entry point for families. We invite our MomCo moms to all these events! There have been many MomCo kids and families at VBC, the Advent Festival, and the Creekside Family Party.

There's a lot of moms who wouldn't feel comfortable showing up to church on a Sunday morning. But a church basement with a community of other moms? That's proven to be an easier sell. If you know of moms who could benefit from this kind of community, now is the time for you to invite them!

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The Music Man

By Noah Neumann

Hello friends! My name is Noah, and I am your Music Director. You might recognize me from my work on 'the stage' and well as 'the donut line'. I am married to a wonderful spouse, Molly, and have a beautiful daughter named Ramona. We also have a very large German shepherd named Schmidt. I've worked in Special Ed for the last decade, toured in a band for the last 7 years, and am excited to add the Music Director role to my plate.

I hail from a small town north of the Cities called Chisago Lakes. A fun fact about the Chisago area is that it is the primary location for Swedish novelists Vilhelm Moberg's 1949 novel "The Emigrants". We're VERY Swedish up there. We're so Swedish that we have all those little painted horses outside of every shop. So if you're wondering why I am the way I am it probably has to do with little painted horses.

I grew up going to a Methodist church with my family. We used to joke that Methodists are just relaxed Catholics, and I hope to embody that general vibe. It was through that church that I came into contact with groups like Acquire the Fire, which is where I was saved. Life has led me to a number of different churches, each with their own style and flair, but those formative years keep bringing me back to churches like that small town Methodist community.

Growing up I was forced to take piano lessons at a very young age (thanks mom and dad). There was

nothing I wanted to do less than play piano. It took years for me to feel like it was anything other than a chore. But, in 2003, in the month of October, my life changed dramatically: I watched the movie School of Rock. It was at that point that I knew one day I would become a rock-star. I would grow my hair out and play classic rock music for millions of adoring fans. Well I don't play rock music (but I do play the occasional bluegrass tune) and I don't have hair, but sometimes we get a little rocking at First Free so I guess that's good enough.

I first came to First Free close to a decade ago. It was soon after Paul started as the worship pastor. I met Paul towards the end of my college career and started playing guitar for him. I really enjoyed those days, but it was difficult for my wife and I to find a church to call home. That's why we were so thrilled our first time at First Free. It immediately reminded both of us of our childhood churches. A church who's multi-generational and focused on community, as well as having a positive impact outside of our walls. We are so happy to be here and call First Free home, and look forward to growing in this community.



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—Noah Neumann



Being with God

By Kris Larson

In the spring of 2006, I was married with two boys ages 9 and 7, and a baby girl who was 18 months. My marriage was complicated. My physical, mental, emotional and spiritual resources were depleting faster than I could renew them, all while desiring to be an active member of our church and make time for relationships with each other, our friends and with God.

While my then-husband and I were in counseling, I received a suggestion that I might benefit from spending extended days in silence at Pacem in Terris, a non-denominational prayer cabin founded in the Franciscan tradition. It is a simple, single bed cabin with an outhouse nearby, a basket of essential food, and a couple gallons of water.

What began as much needed rest in a quiet cabin in the woods, became a recurring sanctuary for me...a time and place intentionally set aside to practice silence, listening, and how to simply be with The Lord.

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her." Hosea 2:14

Pouring out my struggles, mistakes and hopes to the King of The Universe, involved spending some of the most tearful, fearful and fruitful times in my life. Through this prayer time and companionship with the Lord,

The Holy Spirit met me where I was, and, in return, I was able to receive God's loving presence. There were no requirements of me other than simply being His daughter. No boxes to check. No set times to read the Word. No wondering if I'm doing it "right enough." Just simply being with God and receiving His love.

During my regular visits over the past 19 years at Pacem, I was introduced to a practice called "Spiritual Direction." This ancient Christian practice is essentially a ministry of listening and sacred companionship. It focuses on helping individuals discern God's presence in their lives, and respond to divine invitations. It isn't counseling or problem-solving, but rather a meeting of two people who come together in silence and prayer, listening for God's direction. The spiritual director offers a respectful, uninterrupted presence that is confidential, and non-judgmental. The spiritual director offers a safe place to explore one's spiritual journey. They don't presume to have answers, but seek God together, through silence and prayer, at a time set apart, wholly for the directees' benefit. Having received spiritual direction over the past several years, I felt drawn to study the practice myself and in doing so I felt called into the ministry and recently completed a two-year certification in spiritual direction.



There are many ways to meet with God: time in God's Word, time in prayer, Bible study, and serving others, to name a few. Practicing silence, stillness and listening to God alone or with another, have been two of the most transformational practices in my faith. It helps me to come before God honestly without shame or condemnation and deepens my faith and respect for the mystery and awe of how God connects with us. Learning the value of simply being with Jesus in silence in our loud world, alone in a cabin, walking in nature, one-on-one with a spiritual director, or with a trusted friend, is precious and worth practicing.

For information on Pacem in Terris visit paceminterris.org

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