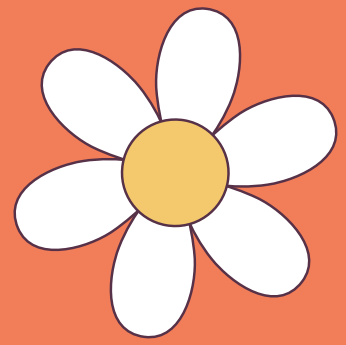
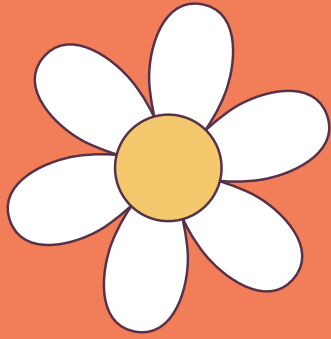


# MONTREAT SMPC YOUTH REFLECTIONS

July 9-16, 2023

MONTREAT, NC



## From Lindsey Odom Director of Youth Ministry

Montreat was one of the most JOYOUS weeks of the year! We began each day with energizers and worshiped and prayed and experienced God's joy in new and exciting ways! The theme of the week was "In-Joy" and we learned about finding joy in community, how God's joy is a defiant joy against the despair, injustice, and hopelessness of our world, that God's joy is in all of us and we are the source of God's joy, that we were created in and for joy, and that joy is not a destination but rather a journey, and because of this, we must nurture and cultivate the joy that God places within each of us and share it with our world that so desperately needs it. For we must remember that it is by the waters of our baptism that God has claimed us and loved us in a spirit of joy and compassion, and we are called to spread that joy to all whom we encounter in hopes that we can transform our world. Our joy must be a defiant joy that comes from God, a joy that is contagious and courageous to confront the injustice of our world today. God has given us so many gifts, one of them being the gift of joy so it is my hope that the youth who attended Montreat will discern how to express this sense of joy that we receive in and through Christ and how they will share it with the world. For nothing can take away the joy that God places within us and if we truly remember this and begin to embody it, then our joy that is found in God can become a vision for what new possibilities could emerge within our world today. The world can be transformed by our joy!

Some of the highlights from the week included our hike to Lookout Mountain, the keynote messages, worship, recreation events, and our back home time with just our SMPC youth group. I am so extremely blessed to be the youth minister at SMPC and be able to help lead these youth on their faith journey and to lead them to discovering what it means to live into God's call and strive to make a difference in the world. It was truly a JOY to be with all of the youth this past week at Montreat. They make my job so easy. Overall Montreat was such an amazing and fun retreat. I am so inspired by SMPC youth and their faith and the way they love each other, look after one another, and treat each other like family. Very thankful to experience this week at Montreat alongside SMPC youth and chaperones and see how they connected with each other and connected with God and learned about God's Joy and how to spread God's Joy to all whom they encounter!!



This week at Montreat, I have loved learning about the in depth meaning of Joy and how everybody within God's creation shall experience God's joy and spread it to everyone we encounter. Some things I learned during our time at Montreat is that God's joy is in you and we are the source of God's joy. This means that the creation of each individual is not just God showing his love by creating each one of us, but also that your emotions and feelings result from God's joy. I also loved learning about how joy is not a destination; rather, it is a journey to discovering joy in and through Christ. I think of it like a train station because when you first get on the train and by the time you get off the train, you will feel different and be changed. The reason for this is not because you finally reached your destination from the train ride, but because of the journey you experienced on that train ride. Lastly, I have loved Montreat because of all the fun recreational activities, small group time, and back home group. Montreat is amazing to experience with my youth group as they are basically family to me and meeting other youth from various churches in small group are things I love about Montreat and would I highly recommend that every youth at SMPC experiences Montreat before they graduate.

*Collin Cushman, Rising 12th Grader*



In my only year that I attended Montreat, I have learned and experienced how tight a church youth group can be. We are like family with each other and it is so special to experience those close bonds with youth within our youth group. The Worship services and keynote messages at Montreat have genuinely opened up my eyes to the power of the church community and how it can bring people together and help them grow in their faith and in their relationship with others. Montreat is such a special place and it definitely allowed me to see and experience God and God's love and joy throughout the week. I was able to grow close to not only the youth within our youth group but also youth from various churches through small groups in and through Christ in such a short amount of time. It was amazing to experience the various ways that God was working during our week at Montreat in bringing us all together to feel closer to God and experience a true sense of community, love, and joy. I never realized how powerful experiencing Joy could mean or even look like until this trip. I never focused on the opportunities for Joy to arise, but Montreat granted us these kinds of opportunities through its environment of faith and fun. This week has brought me true joy and been an amazing and eye opening experience as I continue to grow in my faith and begin a new journey at CCU next year. I would highly recommend every youth attend Montreat.

*Hemp Garand, Graduated Senior*







Reflecting back on these past few days, I have learned so much about myself, my friends, and more specifically, Joy. I think the most important thing I have learned at Montreat is what exactly joy is and I have been able to experience it because of all that Montreat has to offer. From my week at Montreat, I would describe joy as “content reminiscent happiness,” which is best explained in an example. Over the past 4 years of high school, I have had ups and downs, but at the end of my high school experience, I am content and happy looking back at what I have done and been a part of and the events like youth group and retreats such as Montreat that have shaped me into who I am today. I believe that is what joy is and that God is the source of our joy and the joy we experience in our daily lives. I would not have learned what joy is without Montreat. I have so much joy in my life and I owe it all to God and my youth group who are like a family to me.

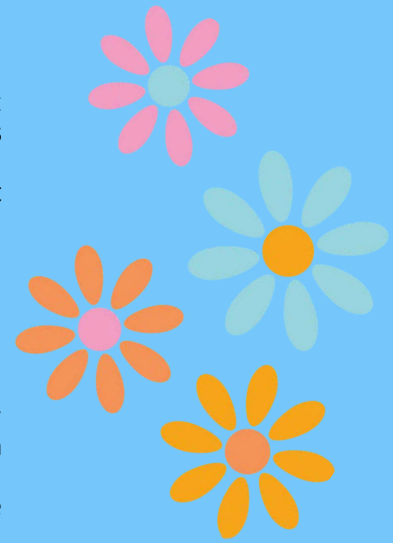
*Alex Schneider, Graduated Senior*

In our week here at Montreat, we have learned about the importance of joy in peoples lives. We realize that in order to cultivate joy, we must have gratitude, we must be creative, we must be generous, and finally we must be genuine. Joy is not the same as being happy; rather, joy is the feeling of being content with the present moment. Joy could be difficult to find, but having a community that is loving and supportive like our SMPC youth group is needed and makes it easy to experience love and joy. It is important to strive to find joy in every day activities, which will help our mental health and always help us remember that God is with us and we have each other. Currently, I hope to find joy every day because joy is always there, even though joy can sometimes be hard to find and difficult to discover and experience.

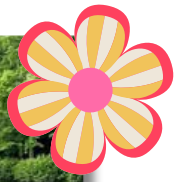
*Andrew Conerly, Graduated Senior*

Montreat was something I was originally skeptical to attend. It had not even crossed my mind to go to Montreat until Youth Sunday when I was convinced to go by all the guys. Even then, I only expected to stay until Wednesday due to work, but I ended up staying the full week and I am so glad that I did. I really enjoyed being able to attend small groups where we were surrounded by youth from other churches and I felt like I could freely share what was on my mind. I do wish I had come to Montreat more in my high school years as Montreat is such a special place. It is also super fun and everyone at the conference is so nice and inclusive. I also appreciated how accepting Montreat is of all people, no matter who you are or what you look like and how they support the LGBTQIA community. This has widened my perspective and view of joy and who God calls us to be joyful around and to show joy to. Overall, I think Montreat is amazing and would highly encourage everyone to go at least once

*Adam Bartholomew, Graduated Senior*



*Good Vibes*



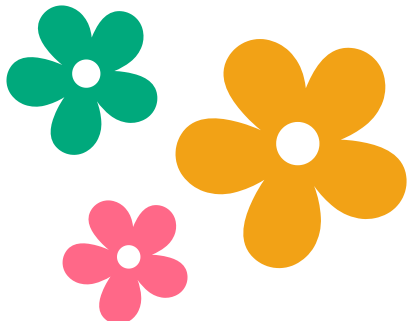
Montreat is like a second home to me where I can spend time with my second family. Before I came to Montreat, I was only close with a few youth at church, but coming to Montreat with new youth from our church has allowed me to cultivate new relationships and friendships that have turned these unfamiliar faces into family. Montreat is a place where you can be yourself and a place that has helped me grow as a person through scripture, games, and worship. During this week at Montreat, I have learned how to find my own joy and how to share God's joy with others. One key person who played a major role in my journey of discovering joy and what it means to live out joy is Ruth Santana, the preacher during our week at Montreat. Every evening, Ruth delivered a strong and inspiring message despite the fact she suffers from a vocal cord disorder known as dysphonia. She shared with us what joy meant to her and how she still experiences joy and refuses to let her voice be silent despite her vocal cord issues, which was really powerful. This set an example for how we are supposed to live in a manner of joy and work together to create a world where all God's people can experience joy in and through Christ. Lastly, Montreat has not only helped me grow in my faith, but also grow as a person and I am so grateful for my time and experiences that Montreat provided me with.

*Xander Case, Rising 12th Grader*



Montreat has been an amazing experience, where I will continue to grow closer with God, my youth group, and youth from my small group. I have learned so much that I can apply to my faith at Montreat. I have learned where joy comes from and how we can help it survive and flourish so that our world may be transformed by God's joy. I have learned that Joy is not a destination; rather, it is a journey and God helps us discover journey on our journey of faith. Joy is also not a destination, but a practice and something we are called to live out as children of God. Joy is also an act of defiance against all the sad and disheartening things that we experience in our lives and in our world, which is why we must strive to live out joy everyday through our words and actions. The world NEEDS our joy. Montreat has been a special and safe place for me to feel closer to God and to the people within my youth group. I have gained so many lifelong friends and many memorable experiences that have shaped my faith and my view of the church. I cannot wait for Montreat next year.

*Haley Davis, Rising 10th Grader*





Montreat has made a large impact on my faith and myself as a person. I have learned all about joy and am excited to use what I have learned about joy in my daily life. One thing I have learned is that we are created in and for joy and God calls us to practice living out joy so that the world may be transformed by our joy that we experience in and through Christ. Through Montreat, I have grown closer to God and to everyone in our youth group and been able to make new friends. The community and hospitality at Montreat is amazing and made me feel like I belong and am loved and valued. Through our small groups, I had the opportunity to participate in conversations that have helped me feel closer to God and answered a lot of the questions that I had. I am very thankful for Montreat and for the special place that Montreat is and how it allowed us to experience joy through small group time, worship, keynote, our hike, and our back home time. I cannot wait to go forth living out God's love and joy and cannot wait for next year at Montreat.

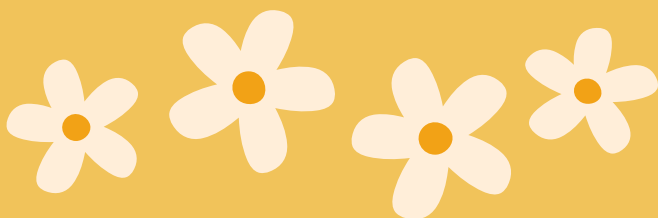


*Caroline Guy, Rising 10th Grader*

During Montreat, I learned a lot about myself and my peers. I discovered that if I let my guard down more that I can help others and myself to become more bonded and close as a group. In my small group at Montreat, I got to meet people from various churches in different states. I loved this experience because it helped me gain new viewpoints and perspectives on the theme of joy that we discussed all week. During Montreat, I grew a lot in my faith from small group time, worship, keynote, walks with Lindsey around Montreat, and during our back home time with just our church. I really enjoyed the Keynote speaker and our preacher for worship as they were very relatable and reminded us that we are all children of God created by God for joy and created by God to spread that joy through our daily lives. They helped me to discover a deeper meaning of faith knowing that God's love and joy follows us wherever we go and I am appreciative of that.



*Lily McNally, Rising 11th Grader*




My time at Montreat has been amazing. For the last two years I've gone, it's been nothing but pure joy. I've arrived at the conference with people that I knew, but not that well, and I have left with each of them as extremely close friends. Montreat offers such amazing opportunities to build relationships that I will have for the rest of my life. Both years, our chaperones have been amazing and I want to thank all of them because it wouldn't be possible without them. This week at Montreat, we learned about joy. My major takeaway was that joy is not a destination, but we feel it along every journey within our lives and that is because of God and God's work in our lives. Joy and happiness are not the same. Joy is not temporary and we have the choice to be joyful every single day.

*Hank Jacobus, Rising 12th Grader*







During my time at Montreat, I learned how joy is a group effort and I saw that in real time with my small group and youth group here at SMPC. I really felt joy and a great sense of community every time I was with my small group at Montreat and made some close friendships. I am so glad to have gained friends that will last a lifetime. My favorite part about Montreat was the glow stick and foam recreation event on Monday. It brought everyone pure joy to be covered in foam and enjoy the glow sticks together. I also got some solid photos and had a really good time. Another good memory was when everyone in our youth group wore the yellow Montreat shirts from last year and we arrived at worship matching each other. I am so happy to have the opportunities I do with SMPC and be able to experience retreats like Montreat. Montreat brought me lasting joy and I hope to be able to live a joyous life and share the joy that we experience in and through Christ with others, even when life gets difficult. I am forever grateful for this awesome week at Montreat and for what it meant to my faith and for being able to meet new friends that embodied joy and love.

*Lily Claire Jacobus, Rising 10th Grader*

This week at Montreat, I not only made lasting connections with friends, but strengthened my relationship with God and learned that when we focus our faith on joy and spreading joy, we not only bring joy to others, but also to God. Furthermore, because we are all created in God's image, we were created in and for joy and were created to live out our joy so that the world may be transformed as God's joy is defiant and is always with us. I made lots of new friends at Montreat through my small group, which was so impactful for me and my faith. Not only was this impactful, but also how we grew closer together as a youth group from our back home time,, trip to Starbucks with Lindsey, the dance and glow party, and karaoke in the car. Because of experiences like Montreat, I have grown closer to God and to each other and made memories that will last a lifetime.

*Cameron Fraser, Rising 12th Grader*

Montreat is not just a church camp, it's a family. Starting from a foam party to rock hopping down the river to the Montreat Variety show or talent show, all of these fun things run deeper than just entertainment. You are with a community of welcoming, accepting, and genuinely nice people. From my experience, Montreat has been pretty life-changing. Through attending Montreat, I have formed a strong brotherhood with some of the best guys I have ever met and at this year's Montreat, that bond only became stronger. The best thing about all of this is you are with your community, your family, and you are worshipping the Lord and deepening your faith. I have learned so much about God and also about myself through the various things Montreat has to offer, such as the uplifting Keynote messages, small group discussions, the late night sermons, and back home time with just our SMPC youth group. All of these things helped me strengthen myself and I've never felt closer to God. This week at Montreat, we had the opportunity to learn about joy and how joy is a gift from God that we are supposed to share with the world. It is my hope that everyone becomes involved with youth group at some point and experiences retreats like Montreat because this is where you will feel that sense of joy from God as we are like a family with each other. And as I go off to college, I cannot thank SMPC enough for experiences like youth group and Montreat over these past four years as they have really shaped me and my faith and brought me closer to God and to each other and I will strive to live out this joy on my college campus next year.

*Kyle Royster, Graduated Senior*

This week at Montreat has taught me a lot about myself but also about others. The SMPC youth group is the best thing that has ever happened to me. There have been so many memorable and fun moments that have made Montreat the best week of the year, from the glow stick and foam party, to Addison Hicks crowd surfing at the dance party, to Collin's music, to us matching with our yellow shirts to go to worship together and through rock hopping, small groups, worship, and keynotes. I love everyone in our youth group so much and I cannot wait till Montreat next year. I think I have gotten a lot closer to the people that I did not know very well before going on this retreat and I am so grateful for the close bond that we share with each other as a youth group that makes it seem like we are family with each other. A couple of things that I learned about the theme joy would be that joy is in everyone. Another thing I learned would be that even in really dark and sad situations, joy is still shown. Overall I think the main thing that I got out of Montreat was that Joy is an act of defiance and we are called to spread joy against the forces of despair and hopelessness that our world experiences.

*Davis Lee, Rising 11th Grader*

This week at Montreat, I learned not only about God and deepened my faith, but also grew closer to people within our youth group and within small groups.. From small group bible study to recreation events outside to worship and keynote and back home time, I have felt that God blessed me with amazing fellowship and people in my life that have embodied what it means to have joy and experience God's joy. The people I have met on this trip and those I have known for years helped me learn more about who I am and who God created us to be. This uplifted my outlook on life as I was reminded that we were created for joy and because of God and the gift of each other, we can help all God's people to experience a true sense of love and joy. Learning how to live "in-joy" and surround myself with meaningful people is something I definitely took away from this trip and something that I will take with me as I go off to college next year and apply to the rest of my life. Montreat is truly a special place for me and I am going to miss it so much.

*Connor Sheeler, Graduated Senior*



During my experience at Montreat, I learned many things. I learned that joy is not only a solo thing, but a group effort and that we were created to experience God's joy and allow others to experience it as well. I also learned that joy is not a destination and that there is joy in the journey of growing closer to God and to one another. During Montreat, I also did a lot of the recreation activities and had so much fun with the best group of people. I could not even name all the fun things we did, but some of the highlights were the hike with Lindsey and other adults up to Lookout Mountain, my small group, our back home time, the pool, and worship. At the end of the hike, I was so tired, but it was so worth it to do it together as a group and see the beautiful sunset over the mountains. We also went rock hopping, which was also a blast. My favorite night was the bubble and foam party night. It was such a blast and like nothing I have ever done before. And even if we were just chilling at our house and sitting on the couch, we were still having fun, especially with Jeana Lee and Lindsey as we shared stories and photos together. There were so many people that I am so happy I met and grew close to. Overall, Montreat was such a blast and I cannot wait to do it again next year. Thank you so much to all of the parents who helped out by chaperoning or donating food and most of all for Lindsey.

*Addison Fraser, Rising 10th Grader*



This was only my second year coming here to montreat and it was even better than the first. I love coming here meeting new people, hanging out with the youth of our church and the lessons we learn. This year, the theme was "in-joy" and it taught us how joy is a journey not a destination and there are going to be many stops along the way. This theme really spoke to me and i feel like it would speak to many others as well. One of my favorite memories at montreat are the recreational activities after worship and hanging out with my good friends from our church and from others just such a fun way to connect and I always have the best times during those activities. Each year during summer, i always look forward to going to Montreat and I cannot wait to go back because it seriously is one of my favorite places where I feel close to God and to each other and experience God's joy in an indescribable way.

*Addison Hicks, Rising 12th Grader*

joy





This year at Montreat was my second year going and it has outdone previous years. I have learned so much during keynote and worship such as God created us to live in community with each other and we need each other to help our joy grow and flourish. I have also learned that God's joy is a defiant joy, meaning it defies apathy, hopelessness, and despair and seeks to work against the injustice of this world so that our world can be transformed. I learned that joy is the defiance of despair because God is the source and foundation of it. I also learned that we are perfectly imperfect and how important my relationships and communities that I am a part of are in my life and also in finding and discovering joy. These relationships, either romantic, platonic, friendships, or family relationships, bring so much joy in my life and help me experience God's joy. Montreat has taught me how to be more accepting of individuals, especially those outside of our church youth group and has expanded my perspective on faith and been so relatable to my teenage years. Montreat makes me realize how grateful I am for my church family, my leaders/ mentors, my lifelong friends, and for chaperones that have dedicated their time and energy to making this the best possible week. Especially for Lindsey, our youth leader, I cannot express how great of a youth leader she is for this church. I can be myself around Lindsey, walk and talk with her around Lake Susan, and joke around with her all while feeling closer to God and to each other. I hope to continue for Lindsey to be a part of my life, even when I go off to college as she brings me so much joy and has taught us all valuable and meaningful lessons. This week at Montreat has allowed me to grow deeper in my faith and allowed me to relax and experience joy with the girls in our house at Montreat. I cannot even begin to name all the times we have laughed and jumped on my bed looking at TikToks and debriefing photos and stories from our day at Montreat. I hope to have allowed the younger girls in our youth group to feel accepted and loved into our church family and convince them to come to Montreat again next year. This trip has opened my eyes to long lasting joy and how blessed I am to live the life I live and have this amazing church community here at SMPC. If I were to encounter a difficult time in the future, I will use this method of looking back at this moment and the experiences I had at Montreat and remember how happy and content I was and the powerful ways I experienced a sense of joy in and through God and through each other.

### ***Brooke Hicks, Rising 12th Grader***

Coming into this week at Montreat, I was questioning my faith in God. I have been out of the church for around 3 years and felt myself slowly slipping away from God, but Montreat was a week like no other. Montreat is life changing and has given me a renewed sense of faith. When I tell you Montreat is life changing, I truly mean it. I have met friends through small group that will last me a lifetime and have grown so much closer to our church youth group. In my small group, #23, I met a guy named Max, who is the most positive person I have ever met. He embodies joy in so many ways. He taught me to never be down on myself and how to find God. On Wednesday, I wore a shirt that said, "Life is good " and when I went to worship, I ran into someone that had a life is good frisbee. If that is not a sign from God telling me to look at the positives in life, I do not know what is. I also met a girl named Mya through small group, who was so outgoing and welcoming. She truly made me look forward to every day at Montreat and never failed to make me smile. Truly without my small group and places and experiences like Montreat, I do not know where I would be. As I am writing this with tears in my eyes, God is shining his light and love on me to keep growing closer to God and to members of my youth group and to keep moving forward in my faith journey. God is encouraging me to experience God's joy and spread it to all whom we encounter and serve. To all the seniors in our youth group, I love you with all my heart and will miss you so much next year. There is not one day I will not think of you and be praying for you on your next journey. To my junior friends in our youth group, which includes Hank, Xander, Davis, and Collin, you all have truly saved me from the darkest of spots and for you, I am very thankful. As Mya, the girl in my small group reminded me that life is the only thing that can fulfill you, I am committing myself to be the most involved person and devote myself more to God. Whether that is attending youth group, mission projects, bible study, or retreats, I will try my best to fulfill this goal. To Lindsey, thank you for always being the best youth pastor and for loving all of us in the ways that you do. You are truly the best youth leader I could ever ask for and you have changed my life completely, whether you know it or not. I would not be here right now if it were not for you and for believing in me and pushing me to become a better person and live in the light of God's love and joy. Montreat is such a special place and has helped me find God in unimaginable ways. Furthermore, as I reflect on Montreat, I am going to try to live out God's joy and allow everyone to experience it so that we can create new possibilities. Lastly, without our SMPC church youth group, I would have never have found a second family that I can be myself around so for this, I am incredibly thankful. I love all of you and would highly encourage everyone to attend Montreat and experience the magic of Montreat and all that it has to offer.

### ***Hunter Fant, Rising 12th Grader***

