

# MASSANETTA MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFERENCE 2025

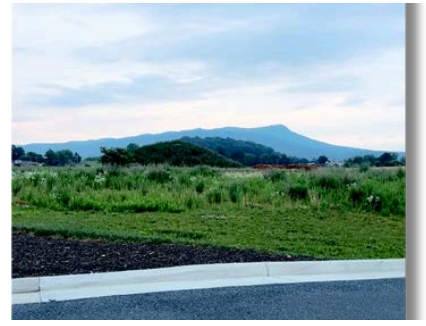
## SMPC YOUTH REFLECTIONS

June 24-27, 2025

MASSANETTA SPRINGS, VA

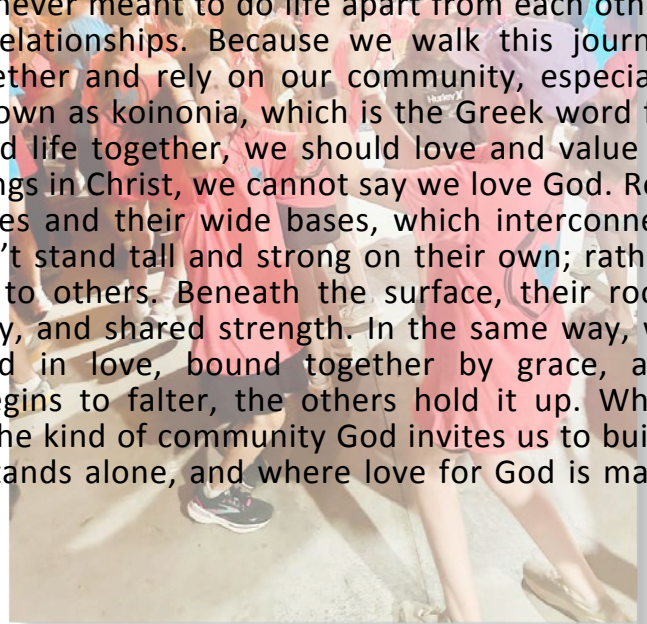
# From Rev. Lindsey Odom

## Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions/Outreach



We had so much fun and fellowship at the middle school youth conference at Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference center. Not only did we experience fun and fellowship, but we had meaningful experiences for our faith and life together through lively discussions, worship services, keynote messages, times for prayer and reflection, and during workshops and recreational activities. The theme of the conference was “Holy Love, Wholly Loved,” from 1 John 4. Other scripture passages we studied and discussed in connection to our theme included the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus walking on water, Deuteronomy 7:9, John 3:16, and 1 John 4:18-19. Through these scripture passages, we were reminded that God’s love pursues us, chases after us, claims us, and calls and commissions us to share it with others. God’s love is the thread that holds everything together. Because of who God is, nothing will ever separate us from God’s love.

Middle School youth had experiences to ponder their identity and learn how that is fluid, meaning it will shift, change, and evolve, but our identity as a child of God will never change. Rev. Seth Lovell reminded middle school youth over and over again that each of them are a beloved child of God created in love and created for love. He also reminded them that their identity as a beloved child of God will never change because no matter who we are, who we identify as, or what we have done, we will always be loved unconditionally by God. So, while our identity might change in some ways, the fact we are loved and claimed by God as a beloved child of God does not. This is our place in God’s story and it informs our faith journey here and now. It should also inform the idea of community and our experiences of community with one another. Middle school youth were challenged to consider how even though we are very diverse and different from each other, we also have a lot in common and one of those things is our universal shared identity and calling. Our universal shared identity and calling is that we are each a beloved child of God and our calling/ purpose is that we were created in love to love. Our purpose begins and ends with love. We are claimed, called, and loved beyond measure by God. Through worship services, encounter group time, discussion time, and workshops, youth were encouraged to recognize and reflect upon what they have in common with each other in order to become closer to one another and begin to love, accept, and value the other person in each of their relationships. They were encouraged to remember and affirm that we were created in and for community and that we belong together. We were never meant to do life apart from each other; rather, we were made for human connection and relationships. Because we walk this journey together, we were made to experience our faith together and rely on our community, especially when life gets difficult, discouraging, and hard. It is known as koinonia, which is the Greek word for community and shared life together. And in our shared life together, we should love and value all God’s children because if we do not love all of our siblings in Christ, we cannot say we love God. Rev. Seth Lovell compared this to a group of Redwood trees and their wide bases, which interconnect with other root systems of other trees. Redwoods don’t stand tall and strong on their own; rather, they survive and thrive because of their connection to others. Beneath the surface, their roots intertwine, creating a vast network of support, stability, and shared strength. In the same way, we are called to live connected lives in Christ—rooted in love, bound together by grace, and strengthened through community. When one tree begins to falter, the others hold it up. When storms come, their unity gives them resilience. This is the kind of community God invites us to build: one where every person is cherished, where no one stands alone, and where love for God is made real through love for one another.





In a world like ours, it can be very easy to tear down, but God instructs us to build each other up in love. Rev. Seth Lovell, our preacher at Massanetta, encouraged us to think about “what would it look like to build communities of love, justice, peace, and grace?” The other mini themes we studied under the broader theme of love were identity, belonging, fear, and calling. In discussing our fears, we were reminded that fear is not a failure of our faith and when fear feels like it is taking over us, we are to feel God’s love near. In our fears, concerns, and worries, God reaches out and is present because God’s perfect and holy love is stronger than our fears and it covers us and sustains us. One of my favorite parts of Massanetta this year was when middle school youth were learning about what love looks like in action, and how they are commissioned by God to take this love of Christ and get it out into the world. In this specific workshop, youth learned about our call to justice and love and how this requires action and advocacy from us. In our discussion about God’s love, the workshop leader reinforced this idea that God’s love is... advocacy and presented middle schoolers with an acronym for advocacy. In an acronym, each letter of the word stands for something. The “A” of “advocacy” represented “acting with courage.” The “D” represented “defending the vulnerable.” The “V” represented “voicing truth in love.” The “O” represented “open hearts and minds.” The “C” represented “Christ as our example.” The second “A” in “advocacy” represented “awareness of injustice.” The second “C” in “advocacy” represented “creating peace and justice.” And the last letter, the “Y” of “advocacy” represented “yes” to discipleship. Through this acronym, “advocacy,” middle schoolers were reminded of the cost of the journey that we take with Jesus and were encouraged and empowered to press on and move forward. They were given a charge to move forward by taking the love of God and getting it out into the world since God’s love is radical, all-inclusive, never-ending, and has the power to change and transform us and our communities. One of the ways that they were told they could spread God’s love is through being advocates and how advocacy consists of acting with courage, defending the vulnerable, voicing truth in love, having open hearts and minds, moving forward with Christ as our example, being aware of injustice and doing something about it, creating peace, and wholeheartedly saying “yes” to Jesus’ call to discipleship.

Lastly, a highlight of this trip was when one of the youth who went with us to Massanetta was very hesitant to do so from the beginning. They were nervous to leave home, unsure if they were ready to be away, even for just a few days. But then by the end of it, something shifted. By the last night of the retreat, they came up to me, eyes wide open with wonder, and said, “I did not want to come on this retreat, but now I do not want to leave. I feel like I actually saw God here. I cannot wait to come back next year.” This made me so happy and showed that they felt and experienced God’s love on this trip. It was at Massanetta that we caught a glimpse of the kind of community God longs for, one where all are welcomed, laughter rings out in every corner, prayers are shared honestly, and no one stands alone. It was a holy space, made sacred not by the place itself, but by the love we shared while we were there. But the truth is, God’s love doesn’t live in one place or one moment in time. The journey did not end at Massanetta. Rather, it begins anew each day, within our schools, our homes, our churches, and in every ordinary moment where we choose love over judgment, belonging over exclusion, and grace over perfection.

You are wholly loved by God’s holy and perfect love, not because you have earned it, but because that’s who God is and what God teaches us to put into practice in our daily living. That same love should call you to help build a beloved community, where no one is left out, and everyone is held in love. We not only learned what it meant to receive God’s love and share the gift of it with others, but we had a lot of fun through free time activities such as pool time, canoeing, porch chair rocking, meals, and spending time together. We also had so much fun during water recreation games, the dance party, the glow party, the slip n’ slide, and energizers (dances) and songs played during worship. One of my favorite parts of my Massanetta was watching our middle schoolers grow closer to God and to each other and go out of their comfort zones to make friends with youth from other churches within their encounter groups. It made me so happy to see their communion and fellowship with one another and the ways in which their faith grew through worship, encounter groups, workshops, back home time, and bible study. Lastly, one of things that stuck with me from worship and that I found particularly powerful was this constant reminder and affirmation that we are “wholly loved by God’s holy love” and we are called to share it. So what would it look like to answer this holy sacred calling of sharing God’s love with the world, in our world that so desperately needs it?



This week at Massanetta, the theme was “Holy Love, Wholly Loved.” I learned so much about friendship and relationships and really connected with God. I had so much fun at the glow in the dark party and loved hanging out with my friends, both inside and outside of my encounter group. My advocate (high school leader) was so nice and welcoming of me. I would like to thank everyone who made Massanetta possible including Lindsey, the adult chaperones, and the people in our church. I cannot wait to come back next summer.

#### **MADILYN BOYES (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

At Massanetta, the theme for youth conference was “Holy Love, Wholly Loved.” We learned about the injured Samaritan man, the parable of the lost sheep, and more to teach us deeper understandings about God’s love and what it means for us. Through our scripture stories, we learned how we are called to extend God’s love to the world so that everyone can experience it. Some of my favorite parts about Massanetta were the lawn recreation games, the slip n’ slide, and sleep. I connected with God more deeply through worship, time of prayer, and the music, especially the theme song for the week. Something else that I learned was that we can always depend on God’s love because it is unconditional and everlasting and we can depend on each other to show us God’s love and help us experience it. Thank you to everyone who went to Massanetta and encouraged me to go.

#### **SEBASTIAN CARR (RISING 7TH GRADER)**



I loved being at Massanetta. I loved all the people there and the community. I loved the outside games like the water games, the dance party, the glow in the dark dance, and the giant slip n’ slide. The theme, “Holy Love, Wholly Loved” helped me understand that Jesus is our light and love and lives inside of each of us.

#### **BRAXTON KASMER (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

I had so much fun at Massanetta because everyone here is so nice and I loved getting to know everyone in my encounter group and church group more. I bonded a lot more with youth from our church through worship, free time, and back home time. The activities were so fun and cool at Massanetta such as the water recreation games, the giant slip n slide, the dance, and the glow in the dark party. I also connected with God and God’s love through nature. Massanetta is so pretty and the spring with natural water in it was so cool to experience and helped me feel closer to God. The water in the spring was so cold but refreshing and reminded me of how God created all of this and created each one of us. God created us to love and to be loved. The skits that the advocates did to explain scripture passages to us were very accessible and helped explain the concept of love further. I am so grateful for this trip and will not forget it.

#### **BRYNN LATZKE (RISING 7TH GRADER)**





My experience at Massanetta was really good and positive. We got opportunities to worship together, hear keynote messages, do energizers, and connect with God through music and skits that helped explain the scripture passages further. We were split into groups with youth from other churches and participated in workshops that incorporated art and advocacy into helping us understand our role in spreading God's love. One of the workshops where we made foil art was amazing as it helped us express what we think about God's love and ask questions. I also loved getting to connect with youth in our youth group and become closer with them, especially Grace and Courtney. I loved the times of prayer and station recreation time as that is where I felt closest to God. That was so much fun and I am so excited to go next year.

**JULIA NANCARROW (RISING 8TH GRADER)**

My time at Massanetta was something that I will never forget. We had so much fun during the pool time, slip n' slide, and so much more. I loved meeting other youth from different churches and bonding with youth from our own church more deeply. On a different note, the worship services, keynote messages, and energizers were amazing. During all the keynotes, we had the same pastor, Rev. Seth Lovell, for the whole youth conference. Pastor Seth delivered a message that was very relatable for us as middle schoolers. He used pictures, videos, and skits during his messages and talked to us in a way that we could really understand and connect to. He always made sure that the keynote message connected to the youth conference theme, which was "Holy Love, Wholly Loved." The energizers like Revolution and Firework were so much fun and they would not have been the same without the energy, enthusiasm, and participation of our amazing advocates (high school leaders)! The advocates were so cool and made encounter groups (small groups) fun and exciting to participate in. Worship had great music and sermons! Things I learned at Massanetta is that we were created by God in love and called to love. Several stories in scripture like the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Lost Sheep helped us understand that because of God's holy and perfect love, we are loved by God and others, and we are made to be in relationship with each other so that God's love can spread and everyone can experience it together. Thank you to Lindsey and all of our chaperones for making Massanetta happen for us. I am also thankful to my mom who could attend this trip as a chaperone too. Also, thank you to everyone at Massanetta for planning this conference for us. I loved it SO MUCH!!

**CLARA GUZMAN (RISING 7TH GRADER)**



# Holy Love, Wholly Loved



At Massanetta, we had so much fun and learned so many things. We learned about the theme, “Holy Love, Wholly Loved.” Then we got split into encounter groups with youth from other churches and with high school leaders called advocates. I loved getting to meet new people from other churches and attend workshops with them where we discussed the scripture passage more in depth and how we see God’s love evident in our lives and in the world, and how we can live into our call to spread God’s love. I really loved learning about the parable of the good samaritan and the parable of the lost sheep and how those two stories represent God’s abundant love for all people. 1 John chapter 4, which is what the theme was based off of, is a super powerful passage in scripture. It reminds us that because of God’s love, we are never alone, God’s love casts out our fears, and we can see love show up in and through community with one another. I also found Massanetta to be so much fun through the glow party and slip n’ slide. Overall, I loved Massanetta and cannot wait for next year.

**GRACE WOOLEY (RISING 8TH GRADER)**



Massanetta was really fun. This was my first time attending this camp and I am so glad that my mom could go along with me as a chaperone. It made me feel more comfortable and it was fun having her there. I really loved the slip n’ slide and pool time. It helped me connect more deeply with youth from our church and begin to form some friendships. The skits were fun and engaging and relatable to our age group. The ice cream and popsicles that we had together as a youth group was one of my favorite memories of this retreat. The theme was “Holy Love, Wholly Loved” and they really helped us understand the wide embrace of God’s love and how we are called to share it with others through keynote, encounter groups, workshops, games, music, and back home time. I loved Massanetta and was glad I could go.

**EMILY MITCHELL (RISING 9TH GRADER)**



During Massanetta, we did so many fun things! Some of my favorite things we participated in were the encounter groups led by the advocates (high school leader), the giant slip n' slide, the vesper service with candles, and free time. My encounter group leader was super welcoming and nice and always knew how to facilitate games, activities, and conversations, and help us get along with each other. She also helped us connect with God deeper as we discussed what God's love looks like, feels like, and how we can share it with others. During the free time, the thing I loved getting to do with my best friends, Clara Guzman, Gracie Carreira, Claire Overcash, Brynn Latzke, and Madilyn Boyes, was go to the pool and hang out in our rooms. Massanetta helped me experience God in big ways through worship and music. The theme of the week was "Holy Love, Wholly Loved." One of my main takeaways was from the story of Jesus walking on water towards the disciples and Peter attempting to step out on water and walk towards Jesus because it taught me that when you have faith like Peter did that allows you to step out and move forward, fear cannot win. Massanetta was amazing all around and I look forward to returning next year.

**APRIL GRACE MARINO (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

**Know therefore that the  
Lord your God is God,  
the faithful God who  
maintains covenant  
loyalty with those who  
love him and keep his  
commandments, to a  
thousand generations,**

Deuteronomy 7:9



Massanetta has been so amazing and fun every year that I have attended. The theme was "Holy Love, Wholly Loved." Through the theme and my encounter groups and church youth group, I grew closer to God and felt God's presence with me during every part of this conference. The skits helped explain the scripture passages that we studied and discussed in worship, keynote, encounter groups, and during our workshops better. My favorite scripture passage was the Parable of the Lost Sheep because it shows us how God always looks after us as we are God's flock and because of God's relentless love, we cannot wander far from God, we cannot allow our fears to come before our faith, and we have community because of the way God created us to be together. Our community raises us up in God's love, supports us through prayer, and shows us what God's love can look like in action. We have to be involved and also do our part in spreading God's love. As a church youth group, Massanetta is always the best because it helps us grow closer to each other and Lindsey and allows us to have much more time together for fun and fellowship. I cannot wait to go back to Massanetta.

**COURTNEY KUSZMAR (RISING 8TH GRADER)**



Massanetta was a wonderful experience, despite this being the last year I could go since I am a rising 9th grader. When I first arrived at Massanetta, I was really nervous for small groups as they are mixed with youth and adults from other churches and you do not know who is going to be in which small group. I was nervous about making new friends, but everyone was so kind and inclusive. I loved becoming friends with other youth and meeting new people. The theme was "Holy Love, Wholly Loved" and it focused on God's unconditional, inviting, and all-inclusive love for everyone. Everyone is one of God's beloved children and everyone receives God's love, no matter who you are or what you have done. One of the scripture passages we studied and discussed was "The Parable of the Lost Sheep," and this passage was key to the theme as the lost sheep represented and symbolized one of God's lost children and how God is always caring for God's own flock of people, looking after us, and bringing us back home because of God's great love for us. The shepherd (God) will care for everyone of his sheep (us, as God's beloved children). There are no exceptions to this. God's love and care reaches all people and no one will ever be left behind because of God and God's abundant love for us. My favorite worship was the one about how our fears should not get in the way of our relationship with God. This is because God is so involved in our lives, already knows our fears, worries, and concerns before we talk to God about them in prayer, and is already working on our behalf due to God's big love for us. This is important for me to remember personally because sometimes my fears that come from stress of school, testing, and sports interfere with my relationship with God, but because of God and who God is, we do not have to worry. God responds with presence, reassurance, and unconditional love in response to our fears, which I can definitely apply to my life and my own struggles after Massanetta. Thank you to everyone who made Massanetta happen. I absolutely loved it and wish I could go back again next year.

#### **CLAIRE LATZKE (RISING 9TH GRADER)**

My first time ever attending a camp like Massanetta was so much fun, amazing, and an unforgettable experience. My advocate (high school leader) named Mia was very nice, encouraging, and taught me a lot. She also played fun games with us and got to know us really well. The A-Team of advocates and the T-Team of advocates who did skits, helped in worship, and lead small groups did a fantastic job making the theme approachable and relatable to our age as middle schoolers. The scripture passages we studied taught me a lot about being a beloved child of God and how because of this, we are always held and sustained by God's love no matter what. It also taught me ways to share God's love and how my faith can take the form of actions in doing that. I felt like I grew a lot closer to God as the whole point of Massanetta was about God and we learned more about God in everything we did. When I got nervous about being away from home or missing my parents or dogs, I would pray, but by the end of the week, I did not feel homesick at all and had no regrets about going. I truly had the best experience at Massanetta and had so much fun during the energizers, slip n' slide and recreation game time, worship time, back home time, and in sharing a room with Claire Overcash. I loved connecting with the youth from our church and making long lasting friendships. Thank you Lindsey, Massanetta, and SMPC!!

#### **GRACIE CARREIRA (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

My time at Massanetta was awesome because we did a ton of fun activities. One of my favorite activities were the slip n' slide and the water games outside. We got to go down a giant slip n' slide that was placed on a really big hill and also got to play with water guns and sponges. All of the advocates (high school leaders) were amazing and they work so hard to make Massanetta an amazing experience for every middle schooler who attends. I am grateful for the advocates and their leadership and the way they made scripture relatable for us through skits, energizers, games, and discussion. The food was really good at Massanetta and we had so many yummy snacks provided for us. The worship services have taught me so much about faith, action, and God's love. I grew in my relationship with God on this trip and hope to keep growing. The theme, "Holy Love, Wholly Loved," helped me understand how big God's love is for all people and how it needs to be spread to a world who really needs it. We all have a role to play in loving others like God loves each one of us. I connected so much with my youth group friends and cannot wait for more youth group activities and retreats like Netta. I cannot wait for next year.

#### **CLAIRE OVERCASH (RISING 7TH GRADER)**





In my final year as middle schooler at Massanetta, this one was the most memorable and fun experience. I would like to thank my amazing advocate (high school leader), Elizabeth, who made this year amazing. I would also like to thank my youth chaperones, especially Lindsey. I am so glad that my mom could serve as one of the chaperones my last year that I could attend Massanetta. I loved having her there and I also loved having my older sister, Haley, there as she was serving as an advocate (high school leader) and did an amazing job using her gifts to lead other middle schoolers. My past advocate leaders were Anne Riley and Mattie, and I got to see them again this year too, which made me really happy. One of my favorite parts of Netta is how we get to wake up during worship and evening worship with energizers, which are fun and lively group dances that we do at Presbyterian church camp together. I also loved being able to connect with others and learn new things about love through team building exercises, community group time, and bonding with members of our youth group and becoming closer to other 8th grade girls in our group. I love connecting with God and growing closer to God and Massanetta always helps me do that. The Vespers worship service which takes place around the big pond at Massanetta that features candles and music is always really moving and meaningful for me and my faith. The theme, "Holy Love, Wholly Loved" taught me more about God's unconditional and abundant love for us and how we were made to experience that love in and through community and how God's love lives in everyone so that we can project it and share it with the world. The gift of God's love is a huge blessing that we do not deserve, but because of who God is, God grants it to us anyway. That is truly amazing and such a gift. Thank you to everyone who made Massanetta special. Being able to attend it with my family - my mom and my sister this year was really special. I hope to come back to Massanetta in a few years and serve as an advocate.

### DYLAN DAVIS (RISING 9TH GRADER)



During Massanetta, I had so much fun. Through games, encounter group time, worship, free time, and back home time with our church, we not only had fun, but I learned more about the love of God and the love we can experience through community with one another. Worship was really engaging and meaningful because instead of just reading from Scripture, they made it come to life and made it relatable for our age group through skits, music, and videos. It really helped me understand the meaning, importance, and calling of these passages. During my encounter group, we had the opportunity to discuss these concepts and scripture passages further. My advocate's (high school leader) name was Brenon and he was really cool and easy to connect with and was very energetic with the games we played. Another one of my favorite things about Massanetta are the energizers we get to do with all of our church friends. The dances and music that comes along with energizers like Revolution and Firework are so fun to do alongside your church youth group friends and make you closer with them. The other best parts about Massanetta were the glow in the dark party, the ice cream mixer, the lawn recreation, the dance, the slip n' slide, eating snacks, spending time with Lindsey and other youth from our church. I absolutely love Massanetta and learned so much about God's love and the love that we are called to spread through faith and action so that all God's people can experience it. Love has the power to calm our fears, spread our faith, and further the kingdom of God. I love Massanetta!

### HANNAH ANGERER (RISING 8TH GRADER)





During Massanetta, I had a lot of fun. I experienced fun with my youth group friends and the friends that I made in my encounter groups, my workshops, and during recreation time. I experienced God here through nature and through worship. During worship and the time of prayer, I felt very close to God and God's love for us. God's love for us goes with us wherever we go and we are called to spread God's love to the places we go. Caitlyn, my advocate leader, was amazing and so much fun. The theme, "Holy Love, Wholly Loved" made me feel loved and valued and connected while I was there. It showed me that God's love is unlimited and for all people. I had an awesome time.

#### **MASON BRIGANTI (RISING 8TH GRADER)**

Massanetta was so much fun and I learned so much about my faith. We were divided into small groups known as encounter groups with high school leaders who apply to serve in a role called 'advocates.' At first, I was really nervous about making friends with other youth from other churches in my encounter groups, especially as we were talking deeply and openly about our faith and God's love for us. We talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan and what we would do if we were in that situation, what our response would be. This really made me think deeper about God's love. We each have a call and role in spreading God's love within our world to all God's people so that we can live into who we were created to be and make the world the place that God intended for it to be. This parable has so much to teach us in modern times about our faith, our daily living, our actions, and how others should be treated. I not only learned a lot that I can apply to my life of faith and grew closer to God and people in my youth group, but I had a lot of fun and made memories. We got to do the giant slip n' slide and water games as well as attend a dance party, ice cream social, and glow in the dark scavenger hunt. Massanetta taught me that we should love in the same ways that God loves us. We should learn how to include everyone and love everyone within our church community and beyond and not be judgmental or make exceptions to this. The theme, "Holy Love, Wholly Loved" made me personally feel loved and helped me realize how much I love our youth group and church community and think about ways I can begin to love everyone and share God's love more. Thank you to our adult leaders, the advocates, Lindsey, and everyone else who made Massanetta so special for me.

#### **LANIE BOLICK (RISING 9TH GRADER)**



During my time at Massanetta, I learned so much about faith, love, and community, and had a great time. This year's theme was "Holy Love, Wholly Loved." We covered the theme in small groups led by our high school advocate leaders and had deep discussions about what we learned. In keynotes during worship, we learned more about parables, specifically the parable of the good samaritan and the lost sheep. Because of these parables, it affirmed and reminded me that God's love is endless, forgiving, and so strong that it can conquer our fears. I also had so much fun at Massanetta through rooming with Hannah and Livi, the giant slip n' slide, the recreation times, during my encounter group time, and all the times I could be with my youth group friends. Finally, I was able to experience God on such a deep level through worship, keynotes, and group bonding time. I was able to not just see God, but experience God being surrounded by nature and in community with one another, and that represented 'love' for me. It showed me how much God loves us and how our purpose begins and ends with love as God's children. God's love is always with us and there is nothing we can do to lose it because we are called to share that gift of God's love with the world around us. Thank you to all the people who made Massanetta happen.

#### **TUULI RITCHIE (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

During Massanetta, we connected with God in a variety of ways. One of the ways we did this was through keynote, worship, prayer, and through fellowship at meals. During the keynote, we were reminded of God's ways and how God does everything out of love for us and how we should to. We also talked about our fears like the fear of not being accepted and the fear of not being good enough and how God's holy and perfect love casts out these fears and reminds us that we are each a beloved child of God created in love and created to love. I had so much fun at Massanetta on the giant slip n' slide, playing soccer, hanging out with the boys from our church in our rooms, and during meals. I just want to thank my leaders and my youth group friends as well as everyone else who plans Massanetta and puts it on thank you for making Massanetta such a special place every year.

#### **JAKE ZAGORA (RISING 8TH GRADER)**



This week at Massanetta, the theme was “Holy Love, Wholly Loved.” We learned about love, community, faith, and action and advocacy. We learned about the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the lost sheep as well as Jesus walking on water. These stories showed me that no one stands outside the realm of God’s love for them and that this should become the way that we live and treat others too. Just like the sheep who got lost, God will come searching for us and rescue us bringing us back home to a place where we are loved, seen, and feel at home. Just like the Samaritan man who stopped and helped the beaten and injured man on the side of the road even though he was not supposed to do this due to religious laws and customs at the time, God’s love crosses boundaries and so should our love for each other. Love also conquers our fears and reminds us that God already knows all of them and is listening and helping us. I had so much fun during the glow in the dark party, encounter groups, station recreation time, and the giant slip n’ slide. I also loved rooming with people from SMPC and making deeper connections and feeling more like a part of the group. It was such an amazing retreat and I would love to serve as an advocate one day and cannot wait for next year.

#### **HARPER LEIGH WOODARD (RISING 7TH GRADER)**

During Massanetta, we had so much fun from hanging out with my friends in our youth group at SMPC to meeting new ones and playing games and connecting faith to worship, prayer, and life. I learned so much about God and grew in my faith. In the lessons we learned about the parable of the good samaritan and how the Samaritan man saved the injured and beaten man on the side of the road, it taught me that our love must have no boundaries and no divisions. Just like God’s love is limitless and unconditional, ours must be too. We also learned about the parable of the lost sheep and how God is our shepherd and will always come looking for us and searching for us if we are lost because that's how big God’s love is for us. These stories also teach us about God’s grace and forgiveness for us. We also had a ton of fun at Netta through energizers, lawn recreation time, the slip n’ slide, and the dance party. My favorite energizers and songs were Revolution, Firework, Prince of Peace, and My Lighthouse. My favorite time of the day at Netta was free time because we got to enjoy the beautiful nature and mountains there and hang out at the pool and in the spring. Massanetta is always so much fun and I cannot wait to come back next year.

#### **LIVI BATES (RISING 8TH GRADER)**



Massanetta was an amazing experience for me because of all the friends I made within my youth group, but also from different churches, and through the activities like the recreation times, the giant slip n’ slide, and during worship. Throughout the trip, I felt the presence of God, not only during worship and prayer, but with my new friends as well when we were spending moments of fellowship together. I am so grateful to Ms. Lindsey, Rebecca, and all of our wonderful chaperones for making this retreat so fun and memorable. I also loved that while I got to meet and connect with youth from other churches, I got to become closer to my youth group friends at SMPC too. What I loved most about the theme, “Holy Loved, Wholly Loved,” and the advocates role in helping us understand this theme more was that it represents true communion with each other and the type of community that the church and world is called to become to match God’s vision for all of creation. We each have a role in spreading God’s love and knowing that we are loved immensely by God and also called to share that blessing with others so they know and can experience God’s love.

#### **SKYE PALMER (RISING 7TH GRADER)**



For the past 2 summers, I have been an advocate at Massanetta Springs Middle School Conference. To be honest the first year I went, I was a little skeptical. I was scared to meet new people, to lead a small group, and to spend 2 weeks away from home. Little did I know, leading as an advocate would be the most fulfilling, sacred, and enriching experience I could have ever done. In those 2 weeks, I found myself a home away from home, that I will forever cherish and will love with my entire heart. The most important thing to me about the camp however, is the other advocates. In the past 2 weeks we've laughed together, sang together, cried together. We've had moments of comfortable silence, and moments of loud, exciting joy. We've made inside jokes only we can get, we've danced and supported each other in ways I can't put into words. It's hard to believe that only 2 weeks ago we knew nothing about each other, because now, I can't imagine a world without them. They have become my best friends, whom I will always love and remember, despite the distance we live. Our one goal of the conference was to bring God's love to all the middle schoolers, or middlers, as Massanetta calls them. The theme this year was Holy Love, Wholly Loved. Which is from 1 John 4, and focuses on the idea that we love because God loves us and because he sent us his one and only son, in hope that we could learn to love. This is love. We love our brothers and sisters, because God loves Us. Those who don't love our brothers and sisters, cannot love God.



Each day focused on a different mini theme, including identity, belonging, fear, and calling. We learned about how God's love for us is revealed in aspects that make us unique, but even if we don't know who we are, God still loves us. We learned about the term koinonia, which means fellowship, and teaches that we should love one another, because God loves us. We also learned about how fear can mask our love, but God's love will mask out fear, even in the darkest parts of your life. Lastly we thought about ways God has shown our love to us and how we show our love to others. One of my favorite ways to worship is through song, and my favorite song that we sang this week is called "For Everyone Born". A lyric that stuck out to me deeply was "The hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong". This to me means that God's love is for everyone, no matter our differences, no matter our age, where we are from, he loves us and we belong in this world because he loves us. One of the most memorable moments I had in the past 2 weeks was after the final worship on the first conference. We were waving goodbye to all the kids when one of the kids in my small group came up to me to give me a hug. He was a quieter kid in my group and it was his first time here. His mom took a picture of the two of us and before she left she said to me "He's had a really good time this week. Thank you for showing him God's love". Massanetta has always been a safe and sacred place to me, but to hear that I brought God's love to others and helped them create a relationship with God, is so much more important to me than learning it myself. To tie it all off, I've learned that true advocacy comes from the heart, and is fueled by God's unconditional love to make a change. I want to thank my fellow advocates who made me see myself and have become my family, and thank you to everybody on the planning and leadership teams who have worked so hard to bring us all together, and the workshop directors who took their time to show the ways in which God loves us through scripture, art, song, and so much more. I wanna thank my parents for choosing a church that gave me the opportunity to go to massanetta when I was just 13 years old. And I want to thank Lindsey for pushing me to be myself and always being proud of who I am. I see God's love in all these people. and I see God's love on the sacred grounds of Massanetta Springs, that I will never forget, and I will continue to share my experiences here.

**HALEY DAVIS (HIGH SCHOOL ADVOCATE)**

