

Peace-ing Together
Peace by Piece
Middle School Conferences 2026



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june 23-26, 2026

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MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFERENCE 2026

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Rev. Lindsey Odom

Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions/Outreach

There is something profoundly sacred about experiencing the Christian faith through the eyes of middle school students. This past week, I had the joy and privilege of attending the Massanetta Middle School Conference alongside 26 incredible youth from South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church and 7 wonderful adult leaders, myself included. Every year I return from Massanetta deeply grateful and reminded why spaces like these matter so much in the faith formation of youth. I am truly grateful that our church has so many young people and we can do retreats like these. As a youth pastor, few things bring me greater joy than stepping away from the normal rhythms of church everyday life and simply getting to be fully present with our middle schoolers by laughing with them, eating meals together, worshiping beside them, watching them build friendships, and witnessing the beautiful ways God moves in their hearts throughout the week.

This year's conference theme was "Peace by Piece," an invitation to think deeply about what peace truly means and how God calls us not only to receive peace, but to actively participate in building it. We began by asking a simple but deeply important question: What does peace mean to us? We reflected on our own experiences of God's peace and explored the first of several scriptures that grounded our week, Romans 14:19, where peace is not described as something passive, but something we actively pursue. Peace, in this text, is a calling. It is a movement. It is action. It is something we chase after because Christ first calls us into God's peace. We were reminded that the peace Jesus gives us is unlike anything the world offers, a peace we cannot fully comprehend, yet one we are invited to embody and extend outward to others.

As the week unfolded, we were introduced to the beautiful biblical understanding of shalom, which is a Hebrew term for peace. It describes God's dream of peace all throughout scripture. It describes God's dream of peace, not simply as the absence of conflict, but a vision of wholeness where everyone belongs, everyone is seen, everyone is valued, everyone is loved, and all creation exists in right and whole relationship with God and each other. I found myself reflecting on how desperately our world longs for this kind of peace and how deeply the Gospel invites us to become people who help build it.

One of the things I appreciated most about the conference theme was how intentionally it moved us outward. We began by talking about inner peace, where we experience God's peace in our own lives, in our schools, our homes, our friendships, and our church community. But then we expanded that conversation and began asking bigger questions about peace in the world around us. We were challenged to see peace not simply as a personal feeling, but as a deeper theological truth about who God is and who God calls us to be.

One particularly powerful moment came as we explored the idea of thin places, those sacred spaces where God feels especially near and heaven feels as though it is breaking into the present moment. Through Mark 4:35-41, the story of Jesus calming the storm, we reflected on the many “storms” in our own lives that disrupt our peace. Through a beautiful garden skit, we were reminded that peace is something that must be tended carefully, nurtured intentionally, and cultivated over time. Peace is not accidental. Like a garden, it requires attention and care.

Later in the week, our conversations shifted again as we reflected on the promise of God’s peace through Psalm 23, remembering that even when life feels uncertain or overwhelming, God remains our shepherd, guiding us beside still waters and restoring our souls. We also spent time reflecting on Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:9, which says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” Together, we wrestled with the difference between being peacekeepers, and being peacemakers, and how peacemakers are those willing to do the difficult and courageous work of helping bring about God’s justice, reconciliation, healing, and peace in the world. What I love most about Massanetta is watching faith become real for our youth.

There is something incredibly moving about seeing middle schoolers worship with full hearts, hearing them sing with joy, dance through energizers, watching them engage deeply in workshops and keynote sessions, and witnessing sacred moments where God breaks through in ways words often fail to capture. The candlelight Vespers service remains one of the most beautiful parts of the week as it is a quiet, holy moment where the presence of God feels almost tangible. The worship, the music, the community, and the conversations all create space for transformation. One of my favorite parts of the conference this year was the theme song, Peace by Piece, by Rich Richards whose lyrics captured the heart of everything we were learning. Here are the lyrics,

“All God’s children come along,
This is a place we all belong,
Piecing together piece by piece.
Bring your peace and I will bring my piece,
Alone we are undone, wholly more than one,
With one voice we lift up your name and join in song.”

Those words beautifully reminded us that peace is something we create together in community. None of us build God’s peace alone. We each bring our piece, and together God creates something whole.

Every evening, our South Mecklenburg group gathered together for what we call Back Home Time, which is a chance to reconnect as just our church family, reflect on the day, laugh together, share where we encountered God, and listen to one another's stories. Those moments are deeply meaningful to me because they remind me that sometimes God shows up most powerfully in simple conversations, honest reflections, shared laughter, and the relationships being formed among our youth.

Of course, Massanetta is also wonderfully fun. The water recreation time, the giant slip-and-slide, late-night laughter, meals together, and the unforgettable glow-in-the-dark dance party all remind me that joy, fun, and faith are abundant at Netta, and built through play, friendship, fun, and shared experiences that create lasting memories. As I reflect on this week, I find myself deeply grateful, and would encourage others to be an adult chaperone leader and experience this for themselves.

Lastly, I am so thankful for our incredible adult chaperone leaders (Joey Bates, Collin Cushman, Rebecca Guzman, Geena Woodard, Shelby Ullman, and Courtney Ritchie) who gave their time, energy, patience, love to care for our youth so faithfully, and help them experience God in new and meaningful ways.

I find myself especially grateful not only for our incredible adult leaders, but also for two young leaders who made this year especially meaningful. It was such a gift to have Collin Cushman serve as our college retreat intern this summer, particularly because Collin himself grew up in the youth ministry here at South Mecklenburg and once attended Massanetta as one of our own students. Watching him return now in a leadership role, pouring back into the same ministry that helped shape his own faith journey, was a beautiful reminder of the lasting impact of the church's investment in youth.

I am also incredibly proud of Haley Davis, who has faithfully served as a high school advocate small group leader at Massanetta for the past three years. Haley has been such a steady, joyful, and faithful leader for our younger middle school youth. I have loved watching the ways she continues to share Christ's love so naturally with those around her. As she prepares to begin college, I hope she knows how deeply proud I am of her and that she continues to shine God's light boldly and use the many gifts God has given her to lead, serve, and make an impact wherever life takes her next.

I am also appreciative of our youth at South Mecklenburg, who continue to inspire me with their openness, vulnerability, joy, and willingness to encounter God in new ways. And grateful for spaces like Massanetta, where young people are reminded that they are deeply loved by God and called to participate in God's dream for the world.

I am also grateful for the number of youth we have at South Meck and how many attended Massanetta this year. We were the biggest church group at the conference and our youth continue to inspire me with their openness, vulnerability, joy, love, and a willingness to encounter God in new ways.

I am also grateful for spaces like Massanetta, where youth are reminded that they belong, that they are deeply loved by God, and called to participate in God's dream for the world.

This week reminded me that peace is not simply something we hope for; rather, peace is a calling, peace is a promise, peace is something we practice, peace is something we build together, piece by piece. And thanks be to God that we do not have to do that work alone.

Rebecca Guzman

Director of Spiritual Formation and Youth Parent

This was my second year serving as a chaperone for the Massanetta Middle School Summer Conference, and I would definitely go back for a third! Because I know some adults wonder what it is actually like to chaperone, I wanted to share a little bit about the rhythm of the week.

A typical day starts with breakfast in the cafeteria. After breakfast, there is a large-group session with energizers, Bible skits, and a keynote that is age-appropriate and relatable for middle schoolers. Massanetta takes middle schoolers seriously as people of faith, and that is one of the things I appreciate most.

Outside of worship, meals, free time, and these large-group sessions, most of the Massanetta experience happens in Encounter groups. Encounter groups are made up of about ten people, including youth and adults from different churches. There are so many things that make Massanetta magic, and Encounter groups are one of them. They are led by high school Advocates — teenagers who have completed 10th, 11th, or 12th grade and go through intensive training to lead these groups. Adult chaperones play a supporting role by modeling participation and positive behavior. Witnessing the leadership of the high school Advocates is definitely part of the Massanetta magic.

Another beautiful part of Encounter groups is the way youth from different places are given a level of freedom they might not always feel in their back-home groups. Because they are with people outside their usual church group, many youth seem to feel freer to share, be vulnerable, and try new things. It is a joy to get to know middle schoolers from other churches, as well as adult chaperones and church staff.

Okay, back to the day! After the morning session, you spend time with your Encounter group debriefing and playing games. Then you go to a workshop led by an adult, often a pastor or church educator. After the workshop, it's time for lunch — and the food at Massanetta is pretty decent!

After lunch, you go to afternoon recreation with your Encounter group. On Thursday, this includes the famous Massanetta slip 'n slide. Then there is some free time, when chaperones help supervise the pool, cold spring, and other outdoor activities.

After free time comes dinner, an evening session, Encounter group, a workshop, and then evening recreation. After evening recreation, it's time for back-home group time to debrief the day with your own church group and help everyone get ready for lights out.

The most difficult part about being a Massanetta chaperone is the schedule. It is exhausting, but any parent of middle schoolers knows that you don't want to give them too much time to get homesick or get in trouble. So yes, you will experience a whole new level of tired. You might even find yourself thinking, "Is this still the same day? Was that today or yesterday?" But the rewards greatly outweigh the exhaustion.

You also do not have to be the most energetic, silly, or experienced person there to be a good chaperone. Your job is mostly to show up, participate, encourage, and help keep everyone safe. The Massanetta staff, Advocates, and other adults help create the structure. Chaperones simply help make the space feel safe, welcoming, and fun.

Here is what I love about Massanetta:

- Worshiping with middle schoolers and seeing them really understand Bible teaching.
- Watching relationships among our youth grow and deepen.
- Getting to know and love new people from other churches, and watching our middle schoolers do the same.
- Witnessing high schoolers in leadership roles and feeling hopeful about the church's current and future leadership.
- Playing! I am usually in charge, but at Massanetta, the adults are supposed to play. It's fun for me to be in a different role with our kids.

What I love most of all is getting a window into their world. You see them in a new way, and our youth are amazing people. It is truly a privilege to spend four days with them. I come home tired every time, but I also come home grateful, hopeful, and full of joy.

It's worth it!

Geena Woodard

Adult Leader and Youth Parent

This was my first time chaperoning at the Massanetta Middle School Retreat. My oldest daughter, Harper Leigh attended last year and loved it so much that she has set her goal on being an advocate when she is in high school. I was so thrilled she wanted me to chaperone, I jumped at the opportunity after the schedules worked out. I will definitely go back!

I was a little nervous about how intense the days were going to be, but keeping that many middle schoolers busy is key! Our day started with breakfast in the dining hall. Salad/ fruit bar with hot options. This organization did a good job of making sure there was something for everyone depending on food allergies or intolerances. After lunch, we circled up as a SMPC group and headed over to the auditorium/worship center where all 226 children and chaperones were gathered. This was a time to sing and get the blood pumping with energizers. I will admit, I was so uncomfortable the first time, but once I got over myself, I found the dancing and singing was infectious. The advocates, who are rising high school juniors, seniors and college freshmen, lead energizers and skits. Our keynote would speak/ preach and tie the theme and message all together. What I loved about our keynote speaker is that all of his stories were relevant to the middle school age child. I really felt that he was speaking to each child.

After the large group session, each advocate breaks the whole into small encounter groups. This was definitely one of my favorite times of day. We would break into groups of 10-12 with kids and adults from other churches. Jordan Booker and I were led by a rising Senior named Cece. Bob and Valeri were the other adults. The middle schoolers in my group were so wonderful. There were sports kids, gamer kids, confident kids, painfully shy kids, misfit kids and cool kids. The first time we met was almost painful watching these kids being all closed off. By the end of our time together, we were all buds. We all experienced something magical in this place. We all came together to be closer to God.

After each encounter group, we had a workshop with another encounter group. This was a fun hands-on way to have interactive discussions about conflict and resolution, good laughter vs hurtful laughter, how to handle anger and other topics that relate to middle schoolers. We met with our counter groups twice a day for small groups and workshops. I thought this was a brilliant way to get each child away from friends and people they know so they could put down any guards and just play as a kid. It was beautiful watching each child in my encounter group open up as the week continued.

After the first set of encounter group meetings, there was lunch, then an awesome recreation

time with encounter groups vs encounter groups. This was another great mingling of new kids. Everyone got 2 hours of free time after rec, followed by dinner, session and more small groups and workshops. It was an incredibly busy day but it was all so perfectly woven together. Each free time a chaperone watches the pool, cold spring, basketball goals and other areas on campus.

This is such an unsure age for children and this camp gave them an opportunity to grow and find community with other children who may not look like them or even act like them. The herd I saw at my time in Massanetta following Jesus, had a lot of black sheep in it. You could see the weight they brought from home. As the black sheep of my family, I could also see the weight lift, as each and everyone of them felt seen.

As a parent, I would love other parents to know:

- You are tired, but it's a "pure" tired. Keeping kids busy is key to keeping them engaged and out of trouble.
- Watching our church kids lead in their encounter groups in a different way that they do at our home church is so fun to see.
- The high school advocates were great. I loved watching that age relate to the younger kids and handle their group's needs and challenges. Awesome leadership opportunity and we got to see our own Haley Davis in action.
- Encounter Groups – Even though I was there to chaperone, I wasn't there to lead. I got to play and engage. I didn't go to camp in middle school or high school so this was so special to me.
- Worshipping in this setting and seeing the middle schoolers really relate to the message.
- Other chaperones. I loved getting to know each and every one of the other chaperones. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to bond on that level.
- Getting to know the adults and kids from other churches.

Courtney Ritchie

Adult Leader and Youth Parent

This was my third trip to Massanetta, and like the previous ones, I was glad that I went. Each time I go, I am amazed that the messages meant for middle schoolers resonate so much with me as well. Massanetta is also a good reminder of the importance of play in our adult lives. Adult chaperones are encouraged to join in the various camp games, and it doesn't take much encouragement as they are a lot of fun. Because of the structure of the camp, I get to see my daughter have these wonderful experiences without getting in her way. Massanetta has also

taught me that middle schoolers are a lovely group to get to know. They are still very much in touch with their inner child, but also starting to see the world for the first time through adult-like eyes. Observing their insights, struggles, joys, connections, and spiritual development has taught me important lessons about grace, welcoming others, and living in Christian community. Plus, I get the opportunity to get to know the other adult chaperones better. I would encourage others to give chaperoning a try. It will be a blessing to you as much if not more than it is to the children you are helping.

Joey Bates

Adult Leader and Youth Parent

I wanted to share some reflections on my experience as a chaperone for the Middle School Massanetta retreat. This was my first time volunteering with the youth program, and after hearing wonderful stories from my children over the years, I was thrilled to participate.

I felt well-prepared for the trip thanks to the Zoom calls with Lindsey and the other chaperones, which clearly outlined the schedule and expectations.

The experience itself exceeded my expectations. I appreciated the opportunity to spend time with my daughter without feeling like I was smothering her. I truly enjoyed bonding with the youth through activities like basketball, the slip and slide, and 9-square; it reminded me of my time as a YMCA camp counselor as a teen. It was also a pleasure to meet members of other Presbyterian churches through the "Encounter" groups and workshops held daily. Finally, I valued the chance to truly connect with the other SMPC chaperones.

I encourage anyone considering chaperoning this trip to take the leap and go.

Youth Reflections

April Grace Marino

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta Springs, I feel deeply grateful for the time I was able to spend with new people and deepening my faith. During my time at Massanetta Springs, I felt closest to God during the times when I was at the cold spring. The theme of this Massanetta is Peaceing together peace by piece. I was able to find my inner peace at the springs where I could listen to the water and people talking in the background. Me and my friends had tons of fun and grew closer to God and each other during our week at Massanetta. I leave this week thankful

for the reminder that God's peace is not something meant only for ourselves, but something we are called to carry into the lives of others each and every day.

Mason Briganti

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this retreat was, peace is a journey, not the final destination. One of my favorite memories while on the retreat was when we all experienced fellowship playing games with one another. Throughout our retreat, I found myself noticing God in so many different places and moments, but one of the clearest ways I saw God working during our time at massanetta it was during prayer and sermon and through friends. Massanetta helped me on my journey of faith, make new friends and experience God in new ways I never had before.

Jake Zagora

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith building friendships and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this retreat was peace isn't the goal but it's the path to get to the goal, which is to love. During our time together, my best memory was when we all play nine square during the outside rec because it was all of us connecting as one church. During my time I connected to god multiple times during prayer energizers, talking with friends and praying before meals. All of my memories for the past three years at netta had made me a better person and closer to Christ and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to go to Camp Massanetta.

Claire Overcash

Massanetta is a Church camp for middle schoolers that I have been going to for 2 years. Massanetta has shaped my relationship with God through the sermons that are super thoughtful and that shine a light on some areas I can improve on and how I can become closer to God. Through the theme this year peace by piece I have come to fully understand what the word "peace" truly means. I used to associate peace with war and stopping it or with a quiet garden or space but through this theme I have learned that peace can be found anywhere in chaos, at school or anywhere that your mind is at rest. Peace can be found with God and we all have a special piece that we can contribute to peace with god and others. At Massanetta we have fun activities, advocates, worships, and workshops. Each workshop helps us to find

activities we can do to be at peace anywhere. Some workshops I have done are things about origami, silent prayers, peace through conflict and more. Massanetta is not all worship because we have free time to grow closer and make new friends. We have so many fun activities that have deeper meanings that play apart in the theme. I have met many new friends from different states and I have gotten to know all of them really well from encounter groups. Overall Massanetta is always a shaping experience for my relationships with others and God:

Grace Wooley

In the past few days I have really enjoyed my time at Massanetta. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to enjoy gods creation in the presence of friends. Something I took away from my experience was that peace can be found anywhere and it looks different for everyone. My favorite memory was doing energizers in evening recreation time or the water activities on the lawn. This week our theme was peace by piece which focused on the many parts of piece. This taught me that peace can have many forms. For me I find peace in listening to music in my room while doing something creative like my nails or painting something. Overall I really enjoyed my Massanetta experience and I will miss it very much.

Savannah Skeen

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this trip was collaborating in group activities. During our time together, one of my favorite memories was participating in group activities. Throughout this retreat, I found myself noticing God has so many different moments. Massanetta was such a good experience, I feel like I got closer to God since I've been here. Leaving Massanetta, I know that God is calling me to take what I learned here and carry it with me beyond this retreat. Three words that describe my experience are growth,adventure, and community.

Paxtyn Sandeen

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this retreat was peace and breathing exercises and to focus on ur breathing as well as ur safe places. During our time together, one of my favorite memories and moments where I had the most fun was during worship when we sang and did energizers which I had a lot of fun doing. As well as hanging out

with my outside group and making a lot of new friends and through experiences like this I was reminded how important experiences like retreats are to our faith, fellowship, and fun.

Throughout our retreat, I found myself noticing God in so many different places and moments, but one of the clearest ways I saw God working during our time at Massanetta was through worship when we would sing and dance together and when we were praising the Lord getting chills.

Whether through worship, keynote, conversations with friends, spending time outdoors through recreation time, laughter, love, or simply being present in community with each other, I was reminded that God is always near us, even in the most ordinary moments of life.

This week, our theme focused on peace, and through reflecting on Romans 14:19, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual upbuilding," I learned that God calls us to receive peace within ourselves by praying and learning more about God while also calling us to actively spread peace into the world around us by showing our love for others and always being there for others. As I think about my own life, I realize that I receive inner peace from laying in my room and reading my Bible, and that my thin place of peace where I can experience God most fully is in a quiet room and in peace, but I also learned this week that God desires for us to trust God fully and remember that true peace comes from knowing that we are children of God and to always find peace. Leaving Massanetta, I know that God is calling me to take what I learned here and carry it with me beyond this retreat. One way I feel called to be a peacemaker in my everyday life at school, with friends, within my family, and in my community is by going to church and praising the Lord. Because of this retreat, I want to make a commitment moving forward to grow my relationship with God and practice my breathing. Looking back on my time here, I can confidently say that Massanetta helped me grow closer to God by teaching me how to be there for others and to find peace, and I leave this place thankful for the reminder that God's peace is not something meant only for ourselves, but something we are called to carry into the lives of others each and every day. Three words that describe my Massanetta experience: Fun, Respect, Love.

Owen Bickett

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this retreat was that making friends is so much easier when you're with a very loving and kind group of people that are also looking for connections.

During our time together, one of my favorite memories and moments where I had the most fun

was the glow party, everyone at massanetta was dancing and connection in ways where we were all having fun and not wasting anytime, just dancing through the night and living the dream, and through experiences like this I was reminded how important experiences like retreats are to our faith, fellowship, and fun.

Throughout our retreat, I found myself noticing God in so many different places and moments, but one of the clearest ways I saw God working during our time at Massanetta was through learning about new people to me at SMPC and other churches, Massanetta is definitely a thin place for me and I look forward to looking back on this wonderful trip where I found peace. Whether through worship, keynote, conversations with friends, spending time outdoors through recreation time, laughter, love, or simply being present in community with each other, I was reminded that God is always near us, even in the most ordinary moments of life. In conclusion, my experience staying at Massanetta springs was filled with new connections, findings of peace, and love for the people i got to know very well.

Alayna Calderwood

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned during this retreat was that faith grows through community, prayer, and a willingness to say 'yes' to God's calling.

During our time together, one of my favorite memories and moments where I had the most fun was staying up late with everyone, sharing laughs and getting to know each other better. Through experiences like this, I was reminded how important retreats are for strengthening our faith, building fellowship, and creating joyful memories together. Throughout our retreat, I found myself noticing God in so many different places and moments, but one of the clearest ways I saw God working during our time at Massanetta was through the worship, prayers, and meaningful conversations that brought us closer to Him. Whether through worship, keynote, conversations with friends, spending time outdoors during recreation time, laughter, love, or simply being present in community with each other, I was reminded that God is always near us, even in the most ordinary moments of life, and that His love is reflected through the people and experiences He places in our lives. This week, our theme focused on peace, and through reflecting on Romans 14:19, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual upbuilding," I learned that God calls us to receive peace within ourselves by choosing faith over fear, extending grace to ourselves and others, and resting in His presence. while also calling us to actively spread peace into the world around us

As I think about my own life, I realize that I receive inner peace from: spending time in prayer,

being surrounded by supportive friends and family, and trusting God through life's challenges, and that my thin place of peace where I can experience God most fully is at cheer, where I can just escape from the world and having no worries, but I also learned this week that God desires for us to trust God fully and remember that true peace comes from knowing that God is always with us, guiding us, loving us, and holding our lives in His hands. Leaving Massanetta, I know that God is calling me to take what I learned here and carry it with me beyond this retreat. One way I feel called to be a peacemaker in my everyday life at school, with friends, within my family, and in my community is by showing kindness, being a positive influence, and treating others with respect.

Because of this retreat, I want to make a commitment moving forward to seek God's peace daily and share that peace with others through my actions. Looking back on my time here, I can confidently say that Massanetta helped me grow closer to God by teaching me to trust in His presence, embrace community, and seek His guidance in every season of life, and I leave this place thankful for the constant reminder that God's peace is not something meant only for ourselves, but something we are called to carry into the lives of others each and every day. 3 words to describe Massanetta are faith filled, transformative, unforgettable

Jordan Booker

Although this is my first and last year at Massanetta, I have enjoyed all of my time here (except the energizers). From the cold spring to Hudson I have been surrounded by great friends and new faces who have welcomed me to their favorite places and experiences in this very special camp. The theme of "Peace by Piece" has really spoken to me on the godly practice of finding your peace in chaos and in "thin places" and the lesson of all of my workshops and the keynotes I have attended. My advocate, Cece, has been very welcoming and fun from the water fights to the reflections after keynote, she has been great and I am grateful that I could have her as my advocate. Throughout this trip I have connected with god in a multitude of places, from Hudson to the cold spring to the front porch with Lindsey and many places in between. In conclusion, I am forever grateful to all of my friends: new people I have met: my advocate, Cece, and the parents, Lindsey, Rebecca, and Colin who made this trip possible.'

Caroline Angerer

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta this week, I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have spent these past few days growing in my faith, building friendships, and learning more about what it means to follow God. Throughout my time at massanetta I have found that I feel more closer to god than I was before I felt I had distanced myself from God. But with this retreat, I have learned more about myself and about God, the theme of peace-ing together,

peace by piece. Throughout all my experiences here and the nervousness of my first year so far, I love it and I want to come back next year and the year after. Something that made this trip better was the advocates, and how kind they were to me, which made me feel able to talk to them. One of my favorite things I did was all of the lawn games and water activities and also one of my favorites was having a cold plunge challenge with my friend Harper Leigh for 30 minutes and I leave this place thankful for there minder that God's peace is not something meant only for ourselves, but something we are called to carry into the lives of others each and every day. Three words that describe my Massanetta experience were peace, love, and grateful.

Serena Samana

Looking at my time at Massanetta this week, I am incredibly grateful for being able to come on this trip and having the chance to grow my faith, build new friendships and learn more about what it means to follow God. One of the biggest things I learned at the retreat this week was if you don't let yourself participate and let yourself learn, then you won't get the full experience. When you do come in open-minded, you feel more well-rounded, which is the perfect environment for growing faith and growing closer to God. During our time here one of my favorite memories and moments where I had the most fun was the Cold Spring because everyone would gather there and just talk to each other regardless of knowing them prior. Also, because of the Encounter groups you were able to walk around camp and say hi to people simply because you knew their name and got to spend time with them. Throughout our retreat I found myself noticing God in so many different places and moments but one of the clearest ways I saw God working at Massanetta was through nature constantly being around us. There was a sense of tranquility and peace which seemed to fit the theme almost perfectly. Whether through worship keynotes, conversations with friends, or being outdoors through recreation time, laughter, love or simply being part of the community, I was reminded that God is always near us, even in the most ordinary moments of life.

Miles Ullman

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta, I am incredibly grateful for spending the past few days here. The biggest thing I learned on the retreat was how to make peace with others the right way. During our time together, one of my most favorite memories and moments where we had the most fun was when we did skits in groups in front of our church members. Through out are retreat I felt god the most at the glow stick party,first we watched the counselors do fun games,then all of us did some energizers. to finish it off we had a glow stick party in the night.It was a great atmosphere and It felt that you were on top of the world. Whether through worship, Keynote, conversation with friends, spending time outdoors through recreation time,

laughter, love, or simply being present in community with each other, I was reminded that God is always near us.

Braxton Kasmer

During our time together, I have made friends and met many cool people and awesome people and bonded more with people from our church. I loved the slipping slide, and I also learned more about the Bible and about the word peace. You could be a peacemaker or peacekeeper. Peacemakers are better because they fixed the problem and kept everybody together and I also loved doing the snake game. I don't know who it was, but it was pretty fun

Elizabeth Gentry

One of the biggest things I learned on our retreat is that everyone belongs at Massanetta. When the pastor said this, it made me feel so warm and welcome. Before I felt like I didn't fit in, and I hadn't made friends. Now I have friends in the group and feel more comfortable.

One of my favorite memories and moments at the retreat was when I was with my friends from our church. We were swimming and pouring buckets of water at each other. It made me laugh and smile and feel happiness in an amazing way. This reminded me how important experiences like retreats are to our faith, fellowship, and fun. Through our retreat, I found myself noticing God in many different places and moments, but one way I saw God the clearest during the retreat was when we were singing songs during the sessions each day. I felt close to people I didn't know from other churches.

Another way I felt closest to God during the retreat was when I was in the creek. I think back and think of Jesus walking on the ocean's waters with the disciples watching. But instead it was my friends and I, and the cold water running over us and our laughter and joy. I receive inner peace when I'm swimming. I feel free and calm even when I'm holding my breath and very tired. My heart is pounding and racing. I feel free, excited, and happy racing through the water.

Because of this retreat, I want to make a commitment to giving myself more rest instead of holding it in. Sometimes I'm nervous to say something because people might think I'm weird. But when I just let it out, I feel better, and my chest isn't tight anymore. This brings me simple and utter peace.

Clara Guzman

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta, I feel so grateful for this opportunity. During this week, I

built friendships, learned more about what it means to follow God, and grew in my faith. One of the most important things I learned during this trip was that peace does not have to come from complete silence.

During our time together, my favorite memory was when we had lawn recreation time together because we were all having so much fun and through this experience, I started to fully understand how important retreats are to our faith, friendships, and fun. Throughout this trip, I saw God during many moments but I saw God the most when we were all having fun together. During all times of the day, it reminded me that God is with us during all moments of our lives.

This week, our theme focused on peace, reflecting on Romans 14:19, which said “let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual upbuilding.” I learned that God calls us to peace by showing us that being a peacemaker is not easy, there are lots of bumps in the road, but if we push through, we will grow in our faith. Leaving Massanetta, I knew God is calling me to carry what I learned with me. Because of this, I want to make a commitment moving forward to follow God in being a peacemaker, no matter what the road might bring.

Harrison Rose

What I did at Massanetta was so much fun. I went to the cold spring, which was really cold, but awesome to play in. Another place I enjoyed was workshops because I got to go everywhere and experience many different types of workshops related to faith and peace. I also loved free time, especially the giant slip n’ slide because it went really fast and was fun. I learned about peace and action, promise and love, and happiness that God gave us to laugh and enjoy life together. A place I felt close to God was Hudson and the front lawn because they were special to me. At the end of each night, we did something fun for recreation time. My favorite was the glow stick party. I also had a lot of fun playing basketball with Joey, Collin, Miles and Felix. I love Massanetta and cannot wait to come back next year. Playing with everyone was such a fun experience plus in the van rides too. I also loved making new friends with youth from other churches whose names were Jordy, Sebastian, and Collin.

Felix Jaynes

I had a great time at Massanetta. One thing I learned was what it was like to be part of a community. One of my favorite moments was playing a game called 9 square. One of the biggest ways I saw God working was through the other campers at Massanetta from different churches. During our week, we focused on peace through reflecting on Romans 14:19, which says “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual upbuilding.” I learned that

God calls us to receive peace through worship with others. I realize I receive inner peace by listening to music and reading. One way I feel called to be a peacemaker in my everyday life is through making sure more people are loved and not fighting. Because of this retreat, I want to make a commitment to praying daily and being more kind to others. I can say confidently that Massanetta helped me grow closer to God by teaching me more about community and what it is like to be part of one. Three words I would use to describe my Massanetta experience are new, exciting, and eventful.

Hannah Angerer

This is my third and final year at Massanetta Springs Middle School Conference. I love sleepaway camps, especially Massanetta. This place is so very special to me. I get to connect with my youth group friends but also God. Massanetta is one of my thin places. Everywhere I look I see beauty in nature. Through the forest and Cold Spring, I have learned so much and during my time about God through this year's theme of peace.

Peace is very important but it does not always mean being quiet, it can mean where you are happy and joyful. In my own life I can help people be peaceful by spreading joy, love and hoping this brings peace. All of this made me realize that I'm at peace more often than I realized because peace is a mix of many positive feelings. Some of my favorite things to do at Massanetta is play nine square because I am SO good at it. I also love going to the Cold Spring. I love lawn rec because that is when we can do the slip n' slip and other water games. I painted my fingernails and toe nails, as well as a tattoo sleeve.

One of my favorite things about worship is doing energizers. I love singing and doing the dance moves even though they are silly. One of my other favorite things about worship are the songs that everyone gets to sing as well as the instruments they use. I also love my encounter group. Everyone is so friendly. I am so so so sad to leave Massanetta because I probably will never be able to come back. I love you Massanetta.

Harper Leigh Woodard

Looking back on my time here, Massanetta has been a place of community, love, and peace. The theme this year was all about peace and honesty. I felt that mostly during the times of noise and chaos and when the whole conference was together. In those places, such as the slip n' slide or the dance, was where I saw God the most. I saw God in the faces of everyone smiling and I saw him in the actions of strangers enjoying the moment together, no matter who their social group is. I probably had the most fun at the cold spring. As some people know, I spent a lot of time at the cold spring during free time, mostly during competitions to see who could stay in the

longest. Being with people that I had never met and talking / shivering with them was really fun and gave me a sense of community. This trip taught me to look for peace, not in the quiet times, but where I felt most comfortable.

Gracie Carreira

This was my 2nd year at Massanetta and it was amazing. One thing I learned was that you just need to step out of your comfort zone to experience new things. One of my favorite memories was the cold spring. Throughout our retreat, I was reminded how important experiences like our retreat are to our faith. One of the clearest ways I saw God was at the glow party. This week's theme was peace. We learned about where we can find peace and how to bring it about. Because of this retreat, I want to make a commitment to try to make peace. Three words that described my trip were: friendships, enjoyable, and changing.

Courtney Kuszmar

At Massanetta, I grew in my faith by paying attention to the sermons and taking in the lessons. My favorite moment at Massanetta was the workshop on making origami cranes. The theme this year is peace by piece, meaning we all should come together and one piece at a time, we should work to build a world that experiences God's peace. That means everyone should help out the world and use money for good instead of bad.

Skye Palmer

My time at Massanetta was filled with new friends and experiences. Each day unfolded with a stated message of peace, reminding me to show everyone love and kindness during my stay. A time that I especially felt God's presence with me was during evening worship as we sang and danced. This was my second year at Massanetta and I am so grateful for everyone that guided me along my journey and helped me have a good time. Friendship was an important part of the trip for me. I especially felt it during rec time, where I could hang out with friends, both new and old.

James Martin

As I reflect on my time at Massanetta, the first few things that come to mind are the fun of lawn rec , the cold spring, and our encounter group times. I love getting to meet new people and share all of these fun experiences with them. I have gone to Christian overnight camps for four years but have never felt the presence of God like I do at Massanetta. During the yoga

workshop, I had time to sit and reflect on my day. I don't know how to explain it but I felt a strong connection to God in that workshop. I would like to thank Lindsey, the parents, and all the youth in our youth group for making this retreat so memorable from overflowing toilets and watching Felix and Harper Leigh compete to who could stay in the cold spring the longest, this was an amazing experience and I will definitely be back next year.

Tuuli Ritchie

This year, I went to Massanetta's Middle School Conference for the third and final time and found joy, friendship, and growth in my faith. Going into this conference, I felt anxieties about high school and negativity about all of the changes that were coming for me.

The second I stepped into the vans to go, though, I felt my fears melt away. Massanetta has been so transformative for me because it has helped me grow closer to God and my friends. I have felt included and loved and felt the first pure joy I've felt in a while on the slip n slide.

This year's theme also spoke to me, teaching me how to find peace and make peace in the middle of chaos. I've felt God's guidance and heard his voice telling me how to approach this next school year.

If there's one thing this conference has taught me, it's that no matter what I have going on inside me, my church family and God will be there for me with open arms.

Livi Bates

During my time at Massanetta Springs I have loved the full schedule of fun activities and 4 crazy fun days. I have gone to Massanetta all 3 years I could, and successfully grew my relationship with God, old friends, and new friends I met in my encounter group.

Being in an encounter group meant stepping out of my comfort zone to meet people from different churches around the country and also meet a new adult every year to help guide me in my faith. With the encounter groups we went to different workshops to learn about our faith and peace in different ways.

I love the morning and afternoon worships because of the amazing lessons as well as energizers and skits. The activities' fun costumes pair with their outgoing personalities and they have amazing dedication towards the middlers having fun at Massanetta.

My time here at Massanetta has taught me patience, peace, and love. Massanetta is a thin place for me and gives me such a nice place to feel like I can be myself and have fun with my friends,

as well as teaching the community and making me realize how important friendship and relationships are and how much I need them in my life.