



## **Morality and Ethics: “If it’s really about the next generation, what should we be thinking, demonstrating, and doing for the next generation?”**

The Summer 2021 theme at BELIEVES around morality and ethics kicked off on July 13<sup>th</sup> with an engaging discussion featuring Drew Hullinger, Executive Director of YMCA Camp High Harbour at Lake Allatoona. The discussion centered on the question – “If it’s really about the next generation, what should we be thinking, demonstrating, and doing for the next generation?”



Hullinger, who is in his 23<sup>rd</sup> summer with the YMCA, all with Camp High Harbour, an overnight and daycare camp for kids ages 7-16 on Lake Burton and Lake Allatoona, started work at the camp in college as a part-time worker and has risen through the ranks.

Hullinger and his wife, Amanda, also met at camp and now both of their two kids are at camp as well.

“One camp rule that’s impressed me is kids aren’t allowed to bring technology for the 1-2 weeks they’re there,” said Maureen Becker, whose son is at the camp and who facilitated the July 13<sup>th</sup> BELIEVES session. “When I pick up my son from camp, he’s the happiest he is all year. What’s the secret?”

Hullinger replied, “To be honest, kids still want their technology. Some will turn in burner phones to keep their real phones. Some also go ‘Shawshank Redemption-style’ with the hole in the book to sneak their phone into camp. Sometimes parents are also enabling the kids to be able to stay in contact.”

He added, “I believe when kids come to us, it’s best they disconnect and be outdoors. ‘Fear of missing out’ (FOMO) is real for kids. We focus on kids being the best version of themselves. This may not be the answer you are expecting, but the answer to your question is love – Christ-like love. Kids share it to help one another too.”

When asked how the kids learn about that, Hullinger shared more.

“It starts with goal setting on the first night,” he said. “Then the staff reads those and discusses them all to figure out how to make those happen. When kids are homesick, the staff is there for the kids too. We focus on teaching the person the character of Christ with staff demonstrating servant leadership.”

“Our staff buy into the YES5 approach that we take with every parent dropping their kid off at summer camp. We teach and coach this weekly through our ‘Charm School’ at porch devotion every Sunday before kids arrive.”

Y – “You never have a second chance to make a good 1<sup>st</sup> impression!”

E – “Exceed Expectations!”

S – “Safety First!”

5 – “You have 5 minutes to make a parent feel completely comfortable leaving their most prized possessions (their kids) with us for the week!”

Eric Maust, a parishioner at CTK whose wife attended Camp High Harbour in her youth, then asked, “With an organization as old as YMCA Camp High Harbour is, was there any institutional knowledge or mantras that got passed down to create the culture that’s there?”

Hullinger recalled a few mantras that have stood out to him.

“The staff are not the kings and the queens. It is the kids,’ is one thing mentioned by someone on staff the first summer I was there,” said Hullinger. “We don’t know where kids come from. That might receive more love in a week at summer camp than they do in the other 51 weeks of the year. We can just pour into them every day,’ is another.”

More on the faith side, Hullinger spoke of two additional mantras.

“The 5-finger prayer – God will never leave me – is something we teach all the kids,” Hullinger shared, “and every day after morning chapel we start the day with the kids saying, ‘Carpe Diem – If it’s to be, it’s up to me.’”

Has Hullinger been able to witness any transformations among the youth that stick out?

“One of my favorites is the 13-15-year-old guys that are ‘too cool to sing’ when they arrive, but are singing on Friday night,” he told everyone. “We also have kids cry at the beginning as well, but then they are also crying at the end because they do not want to leave and they come back year after year. Kids also lead devotionals at camp too, even the 7-year-olds.”

Hullinger went on to share that over the years, some campers have become board members.

As a result of the reach of the YMCA and its board in the community, the board and staff can reach kids all throughout metro Atlanta to have a camp experience.

“Since we’re the YMCA, we have a great opportunity to go after kids in low-income areas that wouldn’t normally get to go to camp,” Hullinger stated. “The YMCA is the longest running non-profit in Atlanta. We give scholarships to all our YMCA branches with 18 full-facility branches throughout metro Atlanta.”

How can parents, and those working with children and youth, incorporate some of YMCA Camp High Harbour’s secret sauce?

“The YMCA is a place to nurture the potential of every child and teen so that everyone has the opportunity to become healthier, more confident, connected and secure,” said Hullinger.

“Related to this, there’s a blog by Frank Powell on what we can do,” he added.

The four key points Hullinger shared from Powell’s blog, along with a few thoughts of his own, were:

- 1. Get on their level.**
  - *Why are we so fast to try to get them on our level? If we are selfish, it is not just a human problem, it is a generational problem.*
- 2. Speak the language of the culture.**
  - *Why are teens on social media? It is the most effective way for them to communicate.*
- 3. The next generation needs to know we are there for them.**
- 4. Invest in them. Take time to get to know them.**
  - *Honestly, if we don’t have mentors – not mentees – we are missing a generation. We must have their voices at the table.*

With the pandemic and uncertainty of the last 12-18 months, what is Hullinger seeing different in kids this year?

He answered, “Mental health is a rising issue we need to address. We knew this would be the case, and brought in a counselor and trained professionals from CHRIS180, but it is bigger than we imagined. The amount of medication we see in our infirmary is increasing yearly.”

To stay grounded amidst all that he sees everyone facing, Hullinger shared that prayer has become more prevalent for him in the last 16 months than in any other time.

When asked how he prays each day, he had this to say.

“The pandemic had moments for me where there was stuff, I thought I was in control of where I wasn’t,” he shared from his reflections. “We lost 75% of the full-time camp staff during COVID. Now I get up a little earlier than in the past to pray. My commitment to God is to reconfirm to Him, ‘I’m a child of God.’ Prayer is not just one time in the morning, but prayer throughout the day. The ‘Psalm for the Day’ that I get, is what I end my day with.”

CTK Parishioner Tim Doyle, then went back to something Hullinger had mentioned earlier and asked Hullinger what some of his favorite goals were that the kids had set.

“My favorite goals are when they help others, or make new friends,” he said right away.

CTK Parishioner Patrice Mantovani then asked how Hullinger and his team reach the families.

Hullinger said they approach this on multiple levels.

“One is with pictures,” he commented. “This is the way we connect to parents. We post 300 photos a day. Someone has the job to do this. He texts parents.”

In addition to sending parents pictures of their kids, Hullinger and his team send kids’ goal sheets home with the kids to the parents for conversation starters.

“We also have an email system where the parents can send a message and we print it out and give it to the kids. We call it ‘bunk notes.’ Kids can’t respond but they get them that day.”

As the time together in the BELIEVES session came to a close, Hullinger was asked one final question.

“What prayer or words from the Holy Spirit do you feel like praying now to close our time together?”

Hullinger responded, “A dozen times in the Bible, God is referenced as Father to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – parent to child. It’s really about spreading the love of God.”

He then pointed to Psalm 145 ...

*I will exalt you, my God the King;  
I will praise your name for ever and ever.  
Every day I will praise you  
and extol your name for ever and ever.*

*Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;  
his greatness no one can fathom.  
One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.  
They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.<sup>[b]</sup>  
They tell of the power of your awesome works—  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.  
They celebrate your abundant goodness  
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

*The LORD is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*The LORD is good to all;  
he has compassion on all he has made.  
All your works praise you, LORD;  
your faithful people extol you.  
They tell of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your might,  
so that all people may know of your mighty acts  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.  
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and your dominion endures through all generations.*

*The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises  
and faithful in all he does.  
The LORD upholds all who fall  
and lifts up all who are bowed down.  
The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food at the proper time.  
You open your hand  
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*

*The LORD is righteous in all his ways  
and faithful in all he does.*

*The LORD is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;  
he hears their cry and saves them.  
The LORD watches over all who love him,  
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

*My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.  
Let every creature praise his holy name  
for ever and ever.*