March 2024

# NEWS FROM RUSSIA

## CHRISTIAN CAMPING INTERNATIONAL/RUSSIA

## 2024 STATISTICS

### 280 PARTICIPANTS
from 67 camps
from 7 countries

### THE LARGEST CAMP TEAM ATTENDING
20 people. Camp Breakthrough, Volgograd.

### 180 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION
8 concurrent tracks, 38 instructors,
complete curriculum.

### AN EXTRAORDINARY FACT
A newlywed couple came to the conference the day after their wedding. What a dedication!

## CHRISTIAN CAMP LEADERS CONFERENCE

February is the month of our annual conferences. Last four years were very far from usual routine. First, two years of covid pandemics. Then, two years of full-scale war in Ukraine. Yet despite the restrictions and barriers, God has blessed CCI/Russia with an uninterrupted series of great conferences. At the time of online webinars and inexpensive no-overnight-stay (one-day) events, we were able to provide our constituency with full-scale five-day face-to-face experiences. Which meant deeper instruction, stronger dynamics of temporary community and more important life decisions.

The theme of the Christian Camp Leaders Conference in 2024 was BEING. We focused on the "ministry of presence" which calls Christian leaders to be "the cities on top of the hill", visibly and naturally representing Christ and His love. This timeless theme has received new relevance since up to one million Russians left the country because of the war, and many others have dropped off from camping ministry. At the time of war and division, the continued commitment to serve kids and youth through Christian camps is a mighty statement about God's Kingdom and God Himself. The goal of the conference was to equip, share experiences, foster fellowship, and encourage those faithful camping leaders.

Watch a 2-minute CCLC Video Report.

# INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH DIRECTORS

During the conference, our new Member Care Coordinator Aleksandra Gerasimova (details below) and I had numerous conversations with key camping leaders. Every lunch and dinner provided a pre-planned opportunity to fellowship with one of CCI/Russia member camp directors. While there were many fruitful interactions, one conversation stands out. **Natalia**, the director of a camp in Rostov-on-Don, near the frontline, shared her concerns about the safety of their campsite and heightened parental anxiety. Despite these challenges, Natalia expressed desire to collaborate with other directors to organize a regional CCI seminar for Southern Russia. The following day, we held a meeting for all camp directors from that region, resulting in a good fruitful discussion on mutual support and collaboration in ministry.

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> **“I received numerous practical ideas for ministry and felt a strong sense of unity with my fellow brothers and sisters.”**

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> **“I felt spiritually refreshed, experiencing God's presence and joy. I relished the fellowship and now feel equipped for ministry. Thank you immensely!”**

**I arrived feeling exhausted, but I am leaving with clarity, inspiration, and encouragement!**

## WAR WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

Every night of the conference, participants gathered in small groups for reflection and prayer. A lady named Olga from Central Russia was in my small group. Two weeks before the conference she laid to rest her husband who was killed in action in Ukraine. At CCLC she laughed for the first time after he died – and immediately asked herself whether she even had a right to experience joy. For Olga, the conference became a time of returning back to life and recommitting to ministry.

Camp Good Samaritan in Siberia serves children of Russian soldiers, including orphans. It also uniquely equips its staff to serve others after the war is over (many more campers with PTSD can be expected).

We understand that our decision to include Olga and Camp Good Samaritan might seem controversial and even be labeled as partaking in the Russian aggression. However, for us these are victims of the same aggression, and we care for them in response to the commandment of James 1:27.

**It was heartwarming to see so many people dedicated to the same ministry**

**The conference gave me a new lease on life. It was incredibly encouraging. I made new friends and gained new ideas. I feel like I am exactly where I am meant to be!**

## PLEASE PRAY

- for dedicated teams organizing Staff Training Workshops in Lipetsk (Central Russia, April 28 – May 1), Riga (Latvia and the Baltics, May 3-6), Ekaterinburg (Urals and East Russia, May 9-11) and Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, May 12-15) and our work in supporting their efforts.

- for the CCI member care initiatives as we plan the work for this year based on the needs of the camps

## THANKING GOD

- for the opportunity to hold the conference amidst difficult circumstances

- for the dedicated volunteers—70 leaders who generously shared their expertise, talents, joy, and love with the attendees.

## HOW TO PARTNER WITH CCI/RUSSIA

Unfortunately, at this moment there is no legal way you can support the ministry of CCI/Russia from the West. However, we now have a staff member in the West. Her name is Aleksandra Gerasimova, and she is one of many Russian anti-war emigrants. Prior to moving to Norway, Aleksandra was a director of a church camp in Moscow and a CCI volunteer with a track record of 15 years. She serves in children's ministry at her local church and explores opportunity to arrange camp leaders training for those serving Ukrainian refugees. She also supports CCI/Russia camps through trips and remote care. If you are interested in learning more about CCI/Russia ministry carried by Aleksandra and partnering with her, please visit her page at Friends of the Great Commission: **friendsgc.com/aleksandra-gerasimova**

**Alexander Kharitonov**
CCI/Russia President