

## ***Leadership Camp Background***

Since coming to South Dakota in early 1880, the Presentation Sisters have been dedicated to education ministry for over 100 years. In 1996, the Sisters continued this commitment of education of youth in a new way, through a leadership camp for middle school girls. Middle school can be a challenging time for any young woman. Studies have shown that young women, who may be at the top of their class in elementary grades, often fall back in middle school because of peer and cultural pressures. Girls are bombarded from all sides by television, social media, advertising, and peers, trying to tell them how to act, how to look, and what to want. The Sisters could see the need for young girls to discover their own inner strength based on Christian values. In response to this need, and sparked by one of their partners, the Presentation Sisters and their volunteer partners developed the Leadership Camp for middle school girls in 1996. The camp has been going strong for the last 21 years and is held at Storm Mountain in the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota.

Leadership Camp Goals: provide a camp where middle school girls

- feel safe and can talk about feelings and faith
- lift the pressures of day to day from their shoulders
- imagine themselves acting in new ways – ways that reflect more fully who they want to become, rather than settling for what is
- meet and interact with role models and peers and learn and teach each other valuable lessons

## ***About Camp***

The camp provides a concentrated time where the Sisters and partners create a positive faith-filled environment which, by the grace of God, does have a lasting impact on the campers given its short duration. The girls experience how much better their lives are when they are respectful and are respected. The camp seeks to augment parental efforts in their quest to provide a supportive environment for their daughters to reach full maturity physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Each morning and evening the campers gather to reflect and pray. The campers see young counselors who have chosen to make their relationship with God a priority. They see the difference this relationship with God makes, and they desire this for themselves. Based on the campers' own words, fostering a closer relationship with God is one of their most influential experiences, in part because they can express this desire openly with each other.

The structure of the camp provides the opportunity for campers to meet new friends through small groups and cabin groups. We know that some of these new friendships have become lifelong friendships. These friendships with campers and junior counselors give the girls the support they need to live by their Christian values during the camp. The counselors are accessible beyond the week of camp by email connections.

In the past 21 years, there have been over 2,000 girls who have attended the Presentation Sisters Leadership Camp. Some of these girls, of course, were at two or three camps because the girls are eligible to attend as they enter 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades.

There have been over 400 adult and young adults who have served as adult and junior counselors. Many of these women have served multiple years, and a few have served 10, 15, and even all 21 years! Each year there are 6-8 Presentation Sisters at the camp serving as coordinators, counselors, nurses, or grandmas.

### ***After camp***

The Presentation Sisters keep in contact with these campers throughout the year via newsletters, Facebook, and emails. We encourage the girls to continue the leadership skills they learned at camp. As the girls get older, we invite them to partake in our expanded high school youth ministries such as Called to Serve Retreats. We also encourage camp alumni to return as camp counselors so they may have the opportunity to mentor a middle school girl.