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[Home](#) / [news](#) /

## Camp Kum-Ba-Yah, Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship celebrate 60 years

By Darrell Laurant



Camp Kum-Ba-Yah and the Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship celebrated their joint 60th anniversary Sunday pretty much as their founding fathers would have done it — sharing food, sharing wisdom and sharing friendship, all of it in a low-key manner.

No fireworks, no visiting politicians. There was, however, an actual founding father on hand to give his approval. Although P.G. Cosby III is 97 years old and a bit frail physically, he still was able to look back over six decades with a clear mind and an unwavering moral compass.

“It was a vision that our family shared,” Cosby said. “Bev (one of his younger brothers) had a strong belief that God calls families as well as individuals to do his work.”

Pat Haley, a member of the LCF board, set the tone in his remarks to an audience seated at picnic tables and in folding chairs, casually dressed and relishing a perfect fall afternoon.

“Look around you,” he said. “Take a deep breath. Feel the warmth. Hear the silence.”

The camp and the various organizations (including LCF) that sprang from it have left a significant imprint on the modern history of Lynchburg. They include the Western Hotel, the Lodge of the Fisherman (where Martin Luther King Jr. once ate dinner), the Gateway, Lynchburg High and Frank Roane apartments and L’Arche of the Blue Ridge. Yet in 1950, not long after two of the four Cosby brothers had returned from World War II service, there was nothing but their parents’ mostly wooded land.

That’s where the four brothers started their camp, the outgrowth of a youth group that met in the basement of their parents’ house. Gradually, they acquired the adjoining parcels until they had amassed enough acreage to challenge a child’s imagination. By all odds, given the location, it should now be covered with town houses instead.

“There were some who felt we might have paid an exorbitant price for some of it,” P.G. Cosby said, “but we’re very grateful we have it now.”

LCF was included in the anniversary because it also sprouted in 1950 — the brothers just didn’t have a name for what was then a central idea.

A pivotal moment for both the camp and the overall ministry came in 1961, after the city of Lynchburg closed all three municipal pools to avoid integrating them. Camp Kum-Ba-Yah promptly opened its newly constructed pool to children of all races.

“Most of the white parents then took their children out of camp,” P.G. Cosby recalled Sunday.

The camp survived, of course. And in the process, LCF and the Church of the Covenant were guided onto a road from which they have never deviated — a thoroughfare on which society’s underdogs are welcome to hitch a ride.

“Everyone is accepted at this camp,” said board member Bill Harris. “It’s a wonderful thing.”

Harris, a friend of the Cosby family since childhood, provided the entertainment for the afternoon with a whimsical magic act.

That, too, was appropriate. It was a magical day.

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