
We Lost Kanuga — and Found Each Other

**An article for the Cathedral Times
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

I have been going to Kanuga all my life. First as a child with my parents. Then as a young parishioner still figuring out what faith felt like from the inside. Then as your priest, which is to say someone paid to notice things. I know every trail. I know the silence of the fishing dock at dawn — hours spent with the kids tying on lures, freeing fish, untangling line, talking about everything and nothing. One of the better kinds of prayer.

The script was familiar and beloved: fried chicken on the lawn, bonfires, square dancing in the parking lot, swimming to the dam and back. Bluegrass music. These were not merely activities. They were liturgy.

Not this year.

The lake had been drained to repair the dam. Rain moved in like a bad houseguest and refused to leave. No fishing. No canoeing. No swimming. No trails. No bonfire. No dancing. The whole beloved script torn away, page by page, until what remained looked an awful lot like nothing.

And then — something older than our plans moved in.

Someone produced a board game. Then another. A poker game appeared in which the object was not to win but to figure out together what winning even meant. A talent show broke out — unscheduled, unpolished, and exactly right. Bald eagles circled the empty lake. The Dean found a barn swallow feeding her chicks in a nest of mud tucked under an eave — full of hungry, wide-open life.

The Cathedral Olympics convened in the gym. A donut-on-a-string relay race descended into passionate theological dispute: must one consume the donut entirely, or merely liberate it from the string? The canon lawyers were unavailable.

Coming out of the gym, we passed a mud puddle where several of our smallest parishioners had gathered for what I can only describe as a baptism — wearing no more than Pentecost requires, completely at home in the world.

Later — and this is the moment the whole weekend revealed itself to me — some children collected rocks and filled water balloons to build a small pond in the mud, so the frogs would have somewhere to live. Nobody asked them to. Nobody suggested it was holy. But it was.

We lost the Kanuga we knew. We lost the lake, the trails, the bonfire, the script. And in losing it, we found ourselves in a place the disciples knew well — the upper room, the plan collapsed, the future uncertain, wondering what came next.

And then the Spirit moved.

Not in fire and rushing wind, but in mud and laughter, in donut arguments and unscheduled talent, in eagles overhead and a swallow's nest built from the very mud we were mourning. In small hands laying stones so that small creatures might live. In all those words across all those hours — the kind that only happen when people are simply together, with nowhere else to be.

We didn't just find each other. We became what we are always being called to become: the Body of Christ.

Every tongue loosened. Every ear opened. Each one hearing the same word spoken into the chaos:

This. Here. Us. Now.

The Spirit does not live in our itineraries. We came to Kanuga looking for the place we remembered. We left having become the place God has been building all along.

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