

**2021 SA Officers' Virtual Retreat  
(a.k.a. Leadership Camp)**

It was through one of our Texas Young Adult Ministries Advisory gatherings that we heard (from one of our Academy Bible chaplains that unfortunately, due to #Covid19, the annual leadership camp for the SA officers (in-person) was cancelled.

When we heard of our student leaders' desire to still have something where they can gather and receive the encouragement & empowerment they need to lead their peers especially through this pandemic, we knew that we had to do something.

Our efforts at leadership development and recruitment needs to intentionally begin while our youth are in our senior academies before they officially enter into young adulthood.

Through numerous studies and research on this particular demographic, we know that at least one out of two will be 'graduating from church' upon graduation from high school. And out of those seeking a higher education, 80% of them are headed to public colleges/universities instead of our Adventist Colleges or Universities. Which makes it harder for our students to find local churches and communities in which they can belong to and continue to exercise their spiritual gifts and lead.

It is with that backdrop that this SA Officers' Virtual Retreat (Leadership Camp) came to fruition. We had every intention to connect, develop, and recruit our student leaders for both the present and the future of our church.

The real privilege this year was the partnership & collaboration with the Southwestern Union Education & Youth Department to co-host & facilitate this leadership camp experience for over 90 SA Leaders from 12 Senior Academies in the Southwestern Union Conference Territory.

Absolutely loved the synergy that was created as a result of inter-departmental & inter-institutional (Conference, Union, & University) collaboration - which resulted in unprecedented empowerment and investment for next generation leaders.

Special thanks to:

1. Bible teachers/chaplains in our academies that came to unite & join forces to minister to the student leaders.
2. SA sponsors, teachers, & administrators that came to cheer, support and celebrate the student leaders.
3. Our speakers (Benjamin Lundquist, Kyle A. Smith, and A. Allan Martin) for pouring into their lives with practical messages of hope with much vulnerability and authenticity.
4. Leadership at Southwestern University (Russ Laughlin, April Snyder, Michael Gibson, Danny Verdugo along with SA & SLAD <Spiritual Life & Development> officers) that took time out of their busy schedule to invest in the lives of our student leaders.

5. Our leaders in the Education and Youth departments (Carol Campbell, Mike Furr, Kisha Norris, Helvis Moody) for their partnership and support for this gathering.

**Student Testimonials:**

**Dawson Par, SA President at STCA**

Leadership camp was such a blessing. It was encouraging to meet other SA members and hear reassuring messages from great speakers. During the camp there was a feeling of community. It was comforting to know that others share the struggles that leaders go through.

**Caitlyn Gonzalez, SA Secretary-Treasurer at SVCA**

Leadership camp was definitely a blessing this year. As my first year attending, I learned just how important leadership is. Not just my position in the Student Association, but in life as well. This pandemic hasn't been easy for our Student Association, but together we learned that we can overcome it and be stronger leaders. I especially enjoyed meeting new students from the different schools and hearing their experiences with leadership. Thank you to everyone who spoke; hopefully next year we'll be able to meet in person and become stronger leaders together!

**Abigail Valerio-Ortiz, SA President at SVCA**

Leadership camp was an amazing experience. I learned a lot on how to be a better leader. I came to understand that no matter what happens, whether it's a difficult student or situation, we can always keep a positive mind and be an example for them. I also learned that of course, there will be negative comments but also positive feedback as well. My school is small and sometimes feeling that the students don't feel motivated can be a hard thing but connected in our small school settings can be our advantage. I learned that being a leader is also understanding others, being there for others, putting yourself second and other people first because you want to be there for them; you want help them grow and help them be a leader because EVERYONE can be one! When you put God in every situation, especially allowing Him to guide you and be a good leader, things will turn out great —especially because it was God's plan! I want to thank everyone, the schools and all the people from the Texas Conference that made this event happen, and even though we couldn't be there in person, it was an amazing experience!

**Racheal Muturi, SA president at JCA**

Leadership camp was an overall good experience. It was well planned and interactive and answered questions that we had. The speakers present had really great advice and addressed literal situations that occur in our leadership positions. Thank you for this opportunity that had us learn more.

Please lift up fervent prayers for our SA officers in our senior academies as they're facing a very daunting task of leading their peers in the midst of a pandemic.

And let us continue to do everything we can to develop and recruit next generation leaders from our schools while they are still with us, and connect them to older young adults and seasoned leaders in our Adventist Colleges and Universities to be mentored and to reverse-mentor. For connection is our only antidote for attrition. And last but not least, let us remember that if we don't actively recruit, they'll find somewhere else to lead and shine.

- *Justin Yang*  
*Young Adult Ministries Director, Texas Conference*

Thank You Video from Scenic Hills Christian Academy

Link: [https://youtu.be/4nY\\_o2naZOM](https://youtu.be/4nY_o2naZOM)