

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE - JULY 31, 2011

Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

"CAMP AND THREATS"

BY DAVID K. POPHAM

The news from Norway is tragic on many levels. However, my heart aches at the invasion of a camp for the purpose of killing as many youth as possible. Even at camps built around political activism, youth arrive with the expectation that they will come to know themselves better, make best-friends-forever, and be empowered to live out their personal beliefs in the world.

Friday morning, if it was the last Friday of the camp, was most likely filled with conversations about staying in touch with one another after returning home. Doubtless, cell phone numbers were exchanged, Facebook pages marked, and plans for visiting each other made. All was changed by a person bent on destruction. Cleverly he set off a bomb in Oslo to distract from the real carnage planned – the slaughter of youth. I cannot help but to tear up at the thought of this encounter between wide-eyed innocence and cold blooded evil.

The tragedy in Norway would be easier to understand if I could make a monster out of the perpetrator of the killings. Alas, I find him more pitiful than loathsome. In the end I suspect we'll find a person whose low self-esteem and self-hatred sought a violent expression for the purpose of attention. The irony is that some of the youth on that island camp would have also been dealing with these same dynamics – except they were seeking solutions in community with others instead of in the violent eruptions of an isolated feverish life.

Speaking candidly, we do encounter “threats” to our camps every year. Some are external, like the noro-virus of 2010. However, the vast majority of threats are internal – issues or items brought to camp by the campers. Most of these dynamics are neutralized or end with a positive outcome due the diligence of our staffs and leaders. From time to time outside authorities, whether they are parents or more formal agencies, are called in to assist. All of this helps to create the “magic” of camp – its transformative nature – which occurs only when campers feel safe enough to let their guard down.

May God's compassion and loving embrace be experienced by the family, friends, and survivors who lives are now irrevocably changed. May the shooter, in his black hole of hate, begin to find the God of love.



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