



Photos by David Colwell/Journal

Friends (top) gather outside the tabernacle for the evening service. Millie Rodriguez (above, left) and Phillip Herbert share a moment of prayer during the evening service at this year's Damascus Camp Meeting.

# Weeklong event revives faithful

By SEAN SCULLY

Journal staff writer

**O**n the road to Damascus, Joan Stanley found the Lord.

As a teen-ager, in an open-air tabernacle in a tiny campground nestled in the woods only a few miles from Damascus, the now 41-year-old Stanley was saved. The annual Damascus Camp Meeting "really redefined my life," she said.

Since 1931, campers have gathered from Montgomery and Frederick counties and beyond for a week every August to hear the words of visiting evangelists and confirm their faith. This year's camp meeting runs through Sunday.

"It's a great spiritual uplift," said lifelong attendee Fred Beal. "It's a great part of life."

The central event at camp is the evening service. The guest Monday night was the

Rev. John Hobbs of North Carolina.

Hobbs began slowly, warming up his audience with jokes and homespun stories.

He assured the people that the Lord loves them. "You know what he wants in return?" he asked, his delivery becoming smoother and more emphatic. "He doesn't need a glass cathedral — although they're nice."

A ripple of laughter swept the audience as Hobbs paused, his eyes twinkling.

"He doesn't need a church hunkered down somewhere," he said, as the audience leaned forward slightly. "All he wants is for you to love him back."

With his audience hooked, Hobbs told the stories of a poor woman anointing Jesus with her most expensive perfume, and of Jesus taking up a towel to wash the feet of the disciples — stories that Hobbs used to teach that Christians-



Ellen Culp (left) and Rita Perna walk to supper in the newly renovated dining hall at the Damascus Camp Meeting this week.

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# Camp reinigorates religious spark

## CAMP MEETING from A1

must be willing both to serve Christ and let Christ serve them.

"I want to submit to you that Jesus is here tonight," Hobbs said, sweeping his hands out in front of him. "He's here tonight with the towel, and he's moving among us. . . . My prayer is that we don't miss him."

Quietly then, after 45 minutes of preaching, Hobbs invited the audience to hear the music of song evangelist David Stevenson and experience the Lord.

"Receive him at whatever level you need that encounter tonight," he said.

Slowly at first, audience members walked down the aisle to a padded railing — kneeling, praying and hugging one another. The first people at the altar were teenagers, followed hesitantly by a few adults.

Others, mostly adults, remained in their seats but raised their palms in the air and gazed heavenward, swaying to Stevenson's lively brand of gospel music.

One young girl burst into hysterical tears and ran out of the tabernacle, followed by a few concerned friends. She returned a few minutes later, smiling weakly, supported on the arms of two friends.

In the front row, a middle-aged man grabbed his head in his hands and began to weep. The Rev. Jerry Beall, president of the camp meeting, and a cluster of other people rushed to his aid. Beall grabbed the man, clutching the weeping face to his chest. The pastor whispered an urgent prayer, ignoring the surrounding swirl of young people — all dancing and singing, their hands raised, their eyes bright, and their skin glowing with the emotion generated by the revival.

After a few minutes, the man brightened, raised his head and wiped his reddened eyes. At almost the same moment, the dancing, swaying crowd in the tabernacle began to slow, its collective energy sapped.

Hobbs, who had been circulating in the tabernacle praying and hugging worshippers, raised his hand and called an end to the evening.

As music continued to play softly, Hobbs invited his audience to leave knowing they are blessed.

The Damascus Camp Meeting, and religion in general,



has changed over the years, with lively music replacing the more staid quiet hymns, said Bernardine Beall, financial secretary of the Damascus Camp Meeting and wife of Fred Beall. Some older camp veterans have a difficult time understanding the new energy, which is usually generated by the young people.

"My husband, who's going to be 65 this fall . . . thinks it's too lively," Bernardine Beall said.

But the level of emotion at camp meetings and revivals hasn't changed, she said.

Camp meetings used to be a regular feature of rural life across the nation, Beall said. But the financial strain of keeping up a campground, and the accumulating distractions of modern life, have cut the numbers of camp meetings.

In fact, were it not for the combined efforts of several area churches, most of them Methodist and Wesleyan, the Damascus Camp Meeting might well have folded, Beall said.

The camp meeting has become a family tradition, Bernardine Beall said.

Stanley of Damascus, for example, began coming with her parents and still attends regularly.

"It brings back a lot of memories," she said. "It helps me understand my commitment."

And now she is bringing her children.

"It helps you grow," said 14-year-old Ryan Stanley, who gave up football camp to attend.

His older brother, Jamie Stanley, plans to go to the Southern Baptist Liberty University in Virginia this fall to expand on the lessons he learned at the camp.

"When I first started going to it, it was just for fun," Jamie Stanley said. "When I got a little bit older, I realized I needed to be closer to God."

Easily a third of the people gathering for the evening service appeared to be teenagers.

"It's life changing . . . every kid who comes here is changed," said youth counselor Nell Baisden, a West Virginia native who discovered the camp meeting several years ago when she was on the staff of a visiting evangelist.

"It was an experience I'll never forget," she said.

