

Good morning. For those of you I haven't met yet, I am Andrew Holden. Over the summer, I attended the SUMMA Theological Debate Camp at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. I was lucky enough to participate in this amazing opportunity because of your generosity. I wanted to tell you about the life changing experience I had at SUMMA because of your help.

On my last day at the SUMMA Theological Debate Camp, I made my final walk to the dining hall. The 15 minute walk felt like five. The people surrounding me made it feel too quick, over too fast. I ate college breakfast for the last time. To be honest, I was fine to get back to my mom's home cooking. On the way back to the dorm, I took pictures, exchanged numbers, and said goodbyes to countless people. As I turned in my room key and got on the bus, my eyes welled with tears. I was sad because my time in Sewanee had ended, but I felt blessed with the experience, the learning, and the friendships gained.

Every day at camp was similar. We would get up and eat breakfast, before having a theology lecture from the camp leader. We would then discuss it in groups of about 15 before lunch. After lunch, we would have a debate lecture, then more small group time, followed by individual work to write our debate. The first week was all preparation for the last two days of the camp, the debates. Each camper participated in at least three debates. I was lucky enough to do four. Every camper had to argue both the affirmative and the negative for the resolution: churches should ban guns in church.

It was a hard resolution. On the surface, it seemed simple, but when you dissected it, there were many layers we had to go through. I learned how to use different sources like the Bible, theological writings and non-religious texts in the theological debate. I also got to make many great new friends. It's amazing how connected you can become in 10 short days of living together. I experienced college life. We studied in the dorms, studied in the lecture halls, and ate in the dining hall at the University of

the South. All in all, it was one of the best and most memorable experiences of my life.

The Rev'd. Dr. Christoph Keller was the camp lecturer. His motto, and the motto of SUMMA, was "speaking the truth in love". This comes from the Bible verse Ephesians four, 14 through 16. "Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become, in every respect, the mature body of Him, who is the head that is Christ. From him, the whole body joined and held together, but every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work."

There are three key parts to speaking the truth in love. The first is having the confidence and the ability to speak. The second is knowing the truth, and the third is love. To be able to speak, you need to have a voice. To develop that voice takes time and practice. It requires a confidence in what you speak of and how you do so. You must not be afraid to use your voice to defend yourself or express your beliefs. It takes time and work, but if you believe in something, you have the ability to articulate that with the right practice. Speaking also requires the discipline to listen. In debate, most of the point differential comes from the rebuttal of your opponents' argument. You can't refute an argument that you didn't hear. If everyone was good at speaking but no one listened, speaking wouldn't matter. Through listening, you send the message to the person you are talking to that their thoughts are just as important as yours, encouraging them to listen to you in turn. Some think that talking is the only way to get ones point across, but listening can be just as powerful.

Then there's the truth. This one can be tricky because the truth can be different for all people. For Episcopalians, the truth is Jesus, who says of Himself in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Even as we all hold Christ as truth, how we understand this truth can vary from one

Episcopalian to another. At camp, the importance of individual exploration and interpretation of the Bible for growth and learning was how I had my interactions with different people.

At the camp, I interacted with people that were Catholic, Protestant, and some that were not even Christian. What I learned was that different people read and interpret the Bible in different ways because of how their lives have affected them. We must respect everyone's interpretation, even if their opinion is different than ours. It is okay to disagree. It is actually better in some ways, because it opens up a dialogue about God, allowing us to see the Bible from other perspectives. It also provides a great speaking opportunity, a way to develop one's voice. As long as we remain respectful of others, we can all seek our own truth through God.

This leads to the final part of the verse: love. Love is probably the most important of these three things because it allows the other two to happen. We can only speak confidently if we know that there are people who love us and will give us support and listen to us no matter what. There's only the truth of Jesus, because of the Love that God had for each and every one of us to send his own son for our sake. We can be respectful of differences of opinion through love. We can grow up as Christians through love. We are saved through love. The love I experienced at Sewanee was unimaginable. People I had met nine days previous were the people I was crying with on the last night. The intense presence of love felt throughout the camp allowed everyone to be confident, have trust in each other, and be comfortable around everyone all the time. That was my biggest takeaway from the camp, that love can connect people in unexplainable and unbelievable ways.

So, what does this mean? How does a SUMMA camp change one's outlook on life? How does speaking the truth in love have meaning in the society that we live in, where it sometimes seems

the only way to get ahead is through lies and deceit?

God tells us this in that same Ephesians verse. "We will no longer be infants tossed around by the cunning of deceitful people. By speaking the truth in love, we will become part of Christ's mature body." Through speaking the truth in love, we mature as humans and as Christians, allowing ourselves to grow closer to God and to be part of the body of people built by love, this church.

This is what it's important. If we all speak the truth in love, we can become connected to people like never before, and find the people that we belong with.

That's what happened to me at SUMMA.