

Nomination for the Laity Denman Evangelism Award-Apryl Miller

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Dan Lebo

Many people within our conference will be familiar with Apryl Miller and why she is such a good candidate for the Denman Evangelism Award. Apryl has been serving the churches and people in our area at Gretna Glen Camp and Retreat Center since 2005 and has been the Director there since 2009. I have had the opportunity to know Apryl in a number of capacities over the past 7 years or so and the reason that I am nominating her for this award is because every aspect of her life and ministry that I have known shares the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the Director of Gretna Glen, her work can often go unappreciated. While everyone that visits the camp will undoubtedly meet her, the work that she does happens largely behind the scenes. Hiring and managing staff, tending to the finances, and working to develop the overall mission and direction of the ministry do not immediately sound like the work of evangelism. However, when you consider the environment and program that she, along with all of her staff, have developed it becomes clear that the work she does is designed to transform the lives of everyone that steps foot on the property.

One of her most important jobs as a director is setting the tone for ministry among the rest of the staff and volunteers who work to implement Gretna Glen's program. This is an area where I have seen Apryl excel. The way that she interacts with her staff, the way that she speaks to and appreciates her volunteers, the way she points people to Christ in each conversation that she has, speaks volumes for her suitability for this award. By looking at evangelism in the spirit of John Wesley and combining works of loving kindness with the sharing of Christian faith, each day Apryl not only personally participates in evangelism, but through her work as Director has created an environment where even the rocks cry out and proclaim the glory of God.

Apryl is patient, humble, and gracious with campers, parents, retreat attendees, volunteers, and staff. She leads the way at Gretna Glen in providing a clear example of what biblical hospitality is meant to be. As someone who has been to Gretna Glen for meetings, retreats, events, and as a volunteer I always felt welcome. What has always been so incredible about the welcome I, and many others feel, at Gretna Glen, is that I don't just feel welcomed by the staff. It is not like when you go to a hotel and the hospitality staff make sure that you have what you need. The culture that has been created at Gretna Glen takes hospitality to another level because I feel welcomed into God's family while I am there. It is a deeper sense of hospitality that is exemplified in Apryl's ministry that classifies it as evangelism in my eyes.

If someone were to look for how lives have been transformed by Apryl's work they can look no further than the success her leadership has brought to Gretna Glen. In the years that she has been the Director the number of campers has increased, and retreat groups are growing. The camp program gives each camper an opportunity to learn more about faith and gives the chance for them to accept God's love into their lives every week that camp is in session. Retreats give participants opportunities to sabbath and take a break from their daily stress and routines and focus on their relationship with Christ. Even serving as a host for groups that do not come from a Christian background, Apryl and her staff are able to share loving kindness with all groups and shine the light of Christ in all situations. It should also be noted that Apryl has specifically worked hard on making the ministry more financially sustainable. This might not sound like the work of evangelism but through these efforts it ensures a bright future for the camp so that it can continue to be a place where people meet Jesus for the first time or deepen their relationship in a place that has been set apart for those purposes.

When I was the Director at Innabah Camp and Retreat Center, Apryl was a tremendous blessing to me as I tried to get a handle on what it meant to run a camp and retreat center. As a pastor, this was a bit of a different role than I had experienced in other appointments and even though I had worked at United Methodist camps for a number of years in various capacities before becoming a pastor, it was an overwhelming task at times. Apryl was a constant companion in those years and made herself available to me via the phone to answer questions or to provide a listening ear. She offered to provide any resources that we needed to help the ministry of the camp. This time was a testament to the loving kindness that Apryl has for all people. She wasn't just concerned with her ministry but was willing to take time out of her schedule no matter how busy in order to help another ministry provide those same experiences with Christ.

Apryl, her husband Chris, and all three of their children Corey, Cole, and Grace are prime examples for the loving kindness that is offered to us through Christ. The staff that they have surrounded themselves with also share that same loving kindness as they work hard to provide an environment and program that allows people to meet Jesus when they spend time at Gretna Glen. If I could nominate all of them for the award I would, but as someone who has served in a similar capacity for a time, I am keenly aware of the importance that Apryl's leadership provides to the rest of those that make the ministry the shining example of God's love and welcoming hospitality that it is. I could go on for pages giving examples of the ways that I have seen how, personally and professionally, Apryl has shared the Gospel in my life and in the life of others. I can think of no one more deserving of recognition for the work that she has done to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world than her.