



Thank you for your interest in JEMS Special Camp. The mission of JEMS Special Camp is *“to share the message and model the love of Christ to those with developmental disabilities, primarily of Asian Pacific American descent.”* We invite you to prayerfully consider whether God might be calling you to serve at this year’s Special Camp, and thus actively partner with us as we seek to fulfill this mission. This ministry has been touching the lives of the campers, their families, and a countless number of aides for the last 50 years.

We assume that if you are reading this, a friend or associate has experienced JEMS Special Camp for him/herself, and has encouraged you to check it out as well. Or maybe you’ve seen a flyer or promotional material about JEMS Special Camp at your church or small group, and wanted to know more. In either case, we would encourage you to first visit the JEMS Special Camp website (www.JEMSSpecialCamp.org) to learn more about the camp and its history, read testimonials from other aides who have served, read how Special Camp has impacted and ministered to campers and their families, and more.

After learning more about JEMS Special Camp, if the Lord is leading you to take the next step and apply to serve as an aide, you may apply online; instructions are posted on the Special Camp website. All applications are subject to approval, but to better ensure a space for you at camp, please sign up as soon as possible. This year’s Special Camp aide application deadline is April 1, 2024.

Below are answers to questions that you might have, as you prayerfully consider whether to apply to serve as an aide:

Q: When will JEMS Special Camp be held this year?

A: Camp week is June 30 – July 6, 2024. If at all possible, aides are encouraged to come to camp the day before camp begins (on Saturday, June 29) to help with camp setup and preparation, and to participate in aide team-building and commissioning.

Q: Where is JEMS Special Camp held?

A: Special Camp will be held at Mount Hermon Ponderosa Lodge in Felton, California, which is where Special Camp and College Camp were held in the 1990s and 2000s. The address of Mount Hermon Ponderosa Lodge is 4600 Graham Hill Road, Felton, CA.

Q: What qualifications do I need to have in order to serve?

A: Special Camp aides come from all walks of life, and have ranged in age from college students to senior citizens. One of the primary requirements of a volunteer is a sense of

“inadequacy”. This enables the Holy Spirit to teach and use us by God’s grace, for His purposes. Other essential qualifications are to be flexible and to have a servant’s heart.

Q: Do I need to have experience in working with the developmentally disabled in order to serve effectively at Special Camp?

A: No. Many of our aides have had no previous experience with the developmentally disabled prior to serving at camp. Regional training (in NorCal, SoCal, and the PNW) will be held approximately two months prior to camp, **which is required for new aides to attend in person**; this training will give you a wealth of information on serving at camp, what to expect, and what is expected of each aide. This year’s regional training will be held in So Cal on Saturday, April 27; PNW and NorCal training will be held on Saturday, May 4. You must ensure that your calendar is clear on one of these mornings to attend this in-person 3 to 4-hour training. Experienced aide(s) who have served for many years will also be in your camper care group with you to help you to “learn the ropes”. Although you will receive a lot of good information through the mandatory pre-camp training, we have found that the best experience is on-the-job training, at camp itself.

A pre-camp planning retreat will also be held the weekend of May 17-19, most likely in Central Coast California. During this retreat, you will be involved in more of the “nuts and bolts” of putting on this year’s camp. A lot of practical information will be shared during this time, so we encourage you to attend and participate in this important pre-camp opportunity.

Q: I’ve heard that I may need to do some very unpleasant tasks as a part of serving as an aide at Special Camp....

A: This is true. We do require that our campers function at a minimum level of self-care in order to be permitted to attend Special Camp. However, as needed, aides may need to assist campers with bathing, dressing, toileting, other hygiene needs, helping them feed themselves, and camp activities. It can be tough for some, but at the same time very rewarding and satisfying, as you serve those whom society might view as the “least of these...” and come to experience how very much they have to offer and teach us. You will be blessed.

Q: What are the accommodations like?

A: Sleeping accommodations at Ponderosa Lodge are cabin-style with bunk beds. Each cabin houses a maximum of 10 occupants—four upper/lower bunk beds and two rollaway beds. Campers usually sleep in lower bunks, with aides occupying upper bunks.

We strive to attain at least a one-to-one ratio of aides to campers to ensure a quality experience for both campers and aides. However, aides are not generally assigned to a specific camper throughout the week; instead, camper care is shared amongst the aides in each cabin group, so that aides can “spell” each other as needed during the week.

Q: You mention that I would be called upon to assist campers with camp activities. What does camp week look like?

A: Each morning, we have an exercise time followed by worship time, Bible lessons and crafts. Each afternoon, the campers participate in a different activity—(M) bowling, (Tu) carnival, (W) excursion to Main Camp*, (Th) swimming pool time, (F) field games.

* Due to COVID-19 related precautions, Special Camp may not be going on some off-campus excursions this year. Alternate activities will be planned for these events marked with an asterisk (*).

Each evening, we have a different special event for the campers, a little over an hour in length. Cabin time follows, then “lights out”.

After the campers are put to bed, the staff has their own time of worship or sharing, staff meeting, snacks/fellowship, and preparations for the next day. It can be an exhausting week, but a very rewarding one as well.

Q: OK, I'm ready to “take the plunge”! What do I do next?

A: You'll need to complete a new aide application form, which can be completed online by following the instructions for **new aides** in the *How to Volunteer* section of the www.JEMSSpecialCamp.org home page. Applications will be accepted starting in mid-to-late February. A part of the application form will require you to submit contact information of a pastor, church leader, and a personal referral contact. Once you have submitted your application, the Special Camp aide registrar will contact your identified references for them to complete letters of recommendation on your behalf. Once the Special Camp aide registrar receives both your completed application form and the letters of recommendation, the Special Camp core team will make a determination of your aide acceptance status to serve at this year's Special Camp. You will receive notification via e-mail regarding acceptance of your application, once that determination has been made.

During the application process, you must be willing to submit to a background check. In addition, the viewing of abuse awareness training and mandatory fingerprinting will be required. You will receive detailed instructions once you have submitted your aide application and once you have been conditionally accepted to serve. We apologize for this inconvenience, but rest assured that the purpose is to provide as safe and secure an environment as possible for our Special Campers.

Each Special Camp volunteer is also required to sign/date and submit a standard-of-conduct covenant form, agreeing to adhere to JEMS-specified standards of conduct. Any violation of the agreed-to standard of conduct would be grounds for dismissal. You will receive detailed instructions regarding the completion of this form once you have submitted your aide application.

This year, Special Camp participants will not be required to be fully vaccinated (as defined by the CDC) to protect against COVID-19—having received the latest bivalent booster—but vaccination is still highly recommended for added protection against severe outcome in the event of COVID-19 exposure.

When you receive your acceptance letter, you will also be informed of upcoming opportunities for training and preparation. It is very important that you take advantage of as many of these opportunities as you are able, to better equip you to serve as an aide at Special Camp. Your acceptance is contingent upon participation in pre-camp

preparatory events. Dates/times of pre-camp events can be found on the website, on the *Info for Volunteers* page.

Q: How much does it cost to volunteer at Special Camp?

A: We view volunteering at JEMS Special Camp as similar to serving on short-term missions, though of shorter duration. As such, volunteers are responsible for covering their camp registration fees and other miscellaneous costs associated with camp.

These costs are as follows:

• Camp registration fee	\$300
• Fees/costs collected at camp	\$0

We charge a registration fee for aides to serve to keep costs for our campers' families down as much as possible, in order to help them to afford to send their special needs child/family member to camp.

Q: Money is tight right now. Is there financial assistance available in order to serve?

A: The Special Camp directors feel that a financial investment/sacrifice by the Special Camp volunteer helps to confirm that volunteer's commitment to the ministry. Thus, it is requested that the volunteer contribute as much as he/she is able, in order to meet the registration fee and other associated financial requirements in order to serve.

That being said, it is recognized that financial assistance may be required by some volunteers to permit them to serve. For those who are accepted, aides are requested to first approach their local church (if they are a member of a local church) for assistance with funding their camp fees, as well as to solicit prayer support as they serve during camp week.

As a supplement to local church funding, financial assistance covering up to half of the camp registration fee is available (for those who require it) from the Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS), which is the sponsoring organization for Special Camp. You will need to complete and submit a separate scholarship application form to apply for this assistance; this form will be sent to you if you so indicate on your initial application form.

The Special Camp aide registrar and directors are available to assist in requesting that your church partner with JEMS in helping financially to permit you to serve; please e-mail:

aide.registrar@jemsspecialcamp.org

if you would like help in pursuing financial support from your local church.

Q: I'm not a Christian (yet). Can I still apply?

A: While most volunteers are Christians (due to the fact that we expect each volunteer to model the love of Christ through their words and their actions throughout camp week), on very few occasions we have accepted those who are serious seekers who can be encouraged by seeing the love of Christ in action. As you see the love of Christ lived out in the lives of both aides and campers, and as He touches your own heart through the week, this may just be the thing that persuades you to commit your life to Him!

Q: I'm not yet out of high school. Can I still apply?

A: Applicants are required to be **18 years of age or older**, at the time of application.

Q: I can't commit to staying the entire week. Can I still apply?

A: Full-time attendance provides continuity for our campers throughout camp week, contributing toward a quality experience for our Special Campers. In addition, JEMS now only permits full-time attendees to serve at JEMS youth camps (including Special Camp), so part-time applicants will not be accepted except under very unusual circumstances. Also, all volunteers, whether full-time or part-time, would need to pay the full-week registration fee; there are no part-time rates for serving at Special Camp. Thank you for your understanding.

Q: I still have more questions. Can I talk with someone?

A: A great place to get a better feel for Special Camp is to attend a Special Camp informational meeting for potential new aides, if one will be held in your area. At that meeting, experienced aides will be present to answer any questions that you might have, and will share their own experiences with you in the process.

To find out when an informational meeting will be held for your area, e-mail one of the following:

- Northern California –
info-norcal@jemsspecialcamp.org
- Southern California –
info-socal@jemsspecialcamp.org
- Pacific Northwest –
info-pnw@jemsspecialcamp.org

Informational meeting dates and locations will also be posted to the Special Camp website, on the *Info for Volunteers* page. Other pre-camp meeting dates/times and locations are also posted on this page. If you have any further questions about serving as a Special Camp aide, feel free to e-mail:

info@jemsspecialcamp.org

Thank you for considering serving alongside us this year at JEMS Mount Hermon Special Camp 2024! We pray the Lord's guidance and direction, as you seek His will for you this coming year.

In His Name & For His Glory,
2024 JEMS Special Camp Core Planning Team