

Back to the Future of Camping

Camping Sunday Service

Preparation:

- As a way to invite people to start thinking about camp, organize a slide show of pictures from [your local camp](#) and have it running as people arrive, or use one of the many camp videos available on the [United Church Camp Playlist](#) on YouTube.
- *A few weeks before*, invite people to plan on bringing photos of themselves at camp—whether a United Church camp or camping trips they took with family or friends.

GATHERING

Welcome & Introduction

Camping is one of the largest youth ministries in the United Church. Camps do everything from building campers' confidence to growing leaders in our church. Each summer at United Church camps, over 20,000 children, youth, and young adults come together to create relationship in community; relationships with one another, with creation, and with God. We invite you to participate in this Camping Sunday service as a time to reflect and renew your call to ministry in the rich traditions that feed you, as well as in new and exciting ways that inspire.

Call to Worship

One: We are summoned here by our holy God,

**All: who calls us each by name,
and gathers us together in the unity of Jesus Christ.**

One: From home and community, from camps and classrooms,

All: we are called into God's presence.

One: Young and old and middle-aged,
individuals and families,
soft-spoken and outspoken,

All: we hear our names being called to join in worship.

One: This house of worship
is a place to pursue God's vision for all people:

**All: unity and joy and faith expressed through different gifts.
Let us worship together!**

Prayer of Approach

Creator God, we hear your wilderness cry from the depth of our souls and long to answer. We seek you out in the silence and beauty of nature, in the sound of the birds, the rustling trees, the lapping water, and the crunching of branches. Our eyes and ears are opened to your presence in the newness of day, the brisk air, and the colours of the sunrise. Be with us in this time of storytelling and memories, guiding us along the forest's edge into oneness with you.

Written for Camping Sunday, 24, 2016.

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Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle to remind us that we are here in Jesus' name, and that our faith is like this flame. It flickers and changes, and sometimes needs to be relit, but its brightness can fill a space.

Hymn: "Called by Earth and Sky" (MV 135), or "I See a New Heaven" (VU 713)

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Children's Time:

Invite children and adults to call out what is the most important thing about camp.
(You may want to "prime the pump" ahead of time so that you get a good variety of answers. See pages 6–7 for a collection of responses to the 2010 "I am Camp" postcard campaign.)

As people are naming the various aspects of camp say: Listen, listen to all of the different things people think are most important about camp...it's important to spend time outside...s'mores are important ...I heard canoeing...campfires...being with friends and making new friends...learning about God...trying new things...mosquitoes...

After several things have been named ask: How can all of these things be the most important thing about camp when they are all so different? *(Allow for a few responses.)* Because people are different, what they think is important is different, too. I wouldn't want to leave out any of these things—well, maybe the mosquitoes.

What I love about camp and what I think is most important is that so many different people come together. Even though they think different things are important, they are all having a great time at camp. I hope when you go to camp you will look around at all the wonderful people and all of the exciting things about camp, and say thank you to God for our differences!

Actually, saying thank you to God for our differences is something we can do anytime. Let's do it right now. On the count of three everyone say, "Thank you, God, for our differences." One, two, three... "THANK YOU, GOD, FOR OUR DIFFERENCES."

Hymn Suggestions: "I Have Called You by Your Name" (MV 161), or "For Beauty of Prairies" (VU 303)

Scripture:

Jeremiah 29:11–14
1 Corinthians 3:10–23

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Message:

United Church Camps face the challenge every year of making the summer camping experience one that is not only fun and adventurous, but also life-giving and transforming. Every summer our camps work to build foundations upon which children and youth can reach their full potential spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically

As Mardi Tindal wrote in the introduction to the 2010 *We Are Camp* resource,

It's often said that there are more Christian formation contact hours with children in one camp session than there are in a year of church school classes. While true, it's not all about quantity of hours; it's also about quality of experience... Camp provides for very practical learning about what it means to be with one another in covenantal relationships that make way for God's healing of soul, community, and creation.

In addition to the irreplaceable children's and youth programs within congregations, United Church Camping is central to our ministry to children, young teens, youth, and young adults. It is also an outreach ministry to people of all faiths and traditions, all ages and stages of life.

For over 90 years, United Church congregations have supported the creation, development, maintenance, and growth of camps. We have also witnessed and experienced grief, anger, and loss when a camp has had to close its doors. Camps have struggled through economic recessions and are impacted by church restructuring and budget cutting, as well as aging facilities.

Human resources are another challenge. Volunteers willing to serve on boards and committees can be difficult to find. Counsellor and program staff positions are more difficult to find as youth seek higher-paying jobs in order to be able to meet rising tuition costs.

Another challenge facing camps today is that the number of racialized people leading and participating in United Church camping ministry does not reflect current Canadian diversity.

Camps also continue to face the challenge of re-visioning and renewing their ministries—considering new possibilities for camping ministry as they move into the future.

For many years, we have assumed that most people born and raised in Canada had heard of—even if they never participated in—the summer camp experience. But for thousands of people in this country—both those born in Canada as well as those who have arrived as immigrants or refugees—the images that fill their mind when they hear the word “camp” may be the opposite of sunny days filled with fun and friendship at a summer camp.

They may think of

- the tent city where they lived as a homeless person or family
- an internment camp or concentration camp—where people are forcibly confined
- a refugee camp—where they lived as a displaced person
- an extermination camp or death camp—designed to systematically kill people

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- a forced labour camp
- a prisoner-of-war camp
- and the list goes on...

Camps—and the wider church—are being challenged to act and help shape ministries that meet the needs of all Canadians regardless of age, disability, gender identity, place of origin, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or any other basis by which a person can be devalued.

Combined, all of the challenges faced by camps, produce the greatest challenge—providing an opportunity to commune with God in a space that is rarely found elsewhere in way that is truly welcoming to all, at a cost that is affordable to all.

Today—thanks to generous United Church congregations and presbyteries, and Seeds of Hope and Mission & Service—United Church Camping remains one of the largest providers of residential camp experience, and the largest Christian faith-based camp provider in Canada.

United Church Camping continues to

- have a significant transformative impact on the lives of children, youth, and adults
- offer programs and activities that encourage imagination, innovation, and exploration
- be a valuable means of Christian education and nurturing community, and learning respect for creation
- give young people a chance to slow down, notice and engage with themselves, one another, and the world around them
- teach young people about the breadth of God: the magnificence of God in nature and the intimacy of God in community

I would like to close today with words from the Rev. Maya Landell (a former Camp Director), and Camp Director Bill Stevens:

As we look to the future of leadership in our world and in our church, it is imperative that we see our camps as training grounds for leadership. Strengthening the ties between church and camp will allow this leadership to continue throughout the year. The possibilities for engaging trained, skilled, and passionate youth and young adults in our faith communities are endless if we as congregations begin to do our work to include and make room for them to lead.

As the prophet Jeremiah assures us, “...I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to give you a future with hope.” Now is the time—let us be generous in our support both in finances and in human resources, and big in our dreaming and re-visioning about how camping ministry can be a source of transformation and joy for all God’s people.

Hymn Suggestions: “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154), or “Open My Eyes, That I May See” (VU 371)

WE RESPOND IN JOY AND FAITH

Sharing of Camp Memories *(optional, as time allows)*

Ask for a show of hands of people who have attended a United Church or other camp. Invite people to share their memories from camp. Welcome stories from those who attended United Church camps, and those who have experienced camp or creation in other ways. Be open to stories that reflect warm and wonderful memories, as well as those not so positive.

Prayer of the People

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

Closing Hymn: "Will You Come and Follow Me" (VU 567)

Benediction

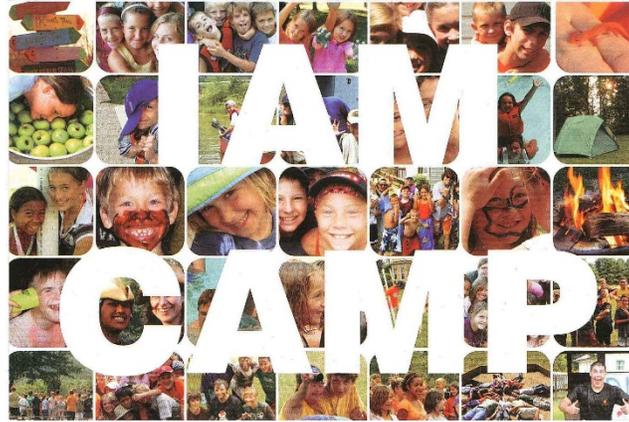


Connections 2016

October 20-23 at Pearce Williams Christian Centre, Ontario

Information will be sent to all camps by late March

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“Dear United Church, Thank you for giving me the camp experience.
What I love most about camp is _____.
Thank you for camp. I believe in camp. I am camp.”

In spring 2009 the “I Am Camp” postcard campaign* created a swell of voices from United Church Camps. By the end, over 4,000 postcards had arrived on the desk of Nora Sanders, General Secretary of the General Council.

Asking campers to choose what they love most about camping was obviously challenging, since many couldn’t decide on any one thing and simply wrote, “Everything!” Here’s a quick summary of what campers and their families shared.

What I love most about camp is...

- activities—arts and crafts, swimming, sports, etc.
- making new friends—“memories that last a lifetime”
- the welcoming and safe community atmosphere
- the beauty of the camp surrounded by God’s creation
- singing around the campfire
- worship and learning about God—“Jesus is alive here!”
- the camp staff and counsellors
- camp food
- growing and learning as a person
- experiencing the acceptance and freedom to be myself
- cabin life (one camper wrote “getting my own bed”)
- dirty laundry from happy kids
- seeing my children smile non-stop!
- the way the church can reach out to young people—the future of the church
- reaching out to youth of all faiths
- watching children discover their inner beauty and God’s eternal love



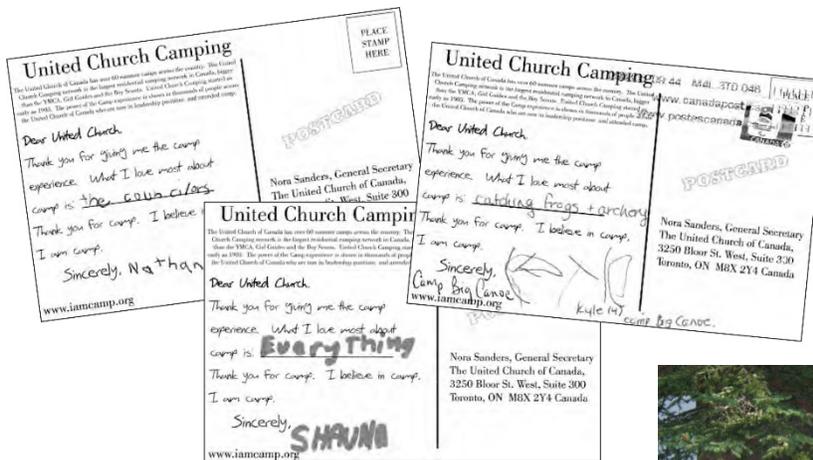
World Camp at Pearce
Williams Christian Centre
in Ontario.

* The “I Am Camp” postcard campaign was created by London Conference camps who invited camps across Canada to participate.

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Campers, staff, and parents often filled up the postcards with additional thoughts:

- Camp is why I joined the United Church.
- I wouldn't change one little thing. This was my first year as a counsellor and I have to say it was absolutely amazing!
- I believe in camp and have believed in it for over 50 years.
- I've served as leader; my children attended every summer—and then as leaders. As a single parent I appreciated the spiritual guidance the camp gave and lived!
- Camp was the start of my journey to become a minister.
- Camp encourages the kid in adults, and responsibility in youth.
- I will never have a better bonding experience with those around me.
- My son cried because he didn't want to leave! "It was the best week of my life!" was his comment when I came to take him home.
- I met my wife at camp.
- I met my husband at camp.
- My mother was a camper, I was a camper, now my children are campers.
- At camp I met the most influential people in my life.
- Camp changed my life.
- Camp developed me into who I am today as regards my confidence, abilities, and personality, how I work and play, how I treat others, and my appreciation for the elements of nature and life. I love how camp made me part of who I am.



Campers with staff at Surprise Lake Camp in Alberta