

What Are United Church Camps Actually About?

Camping Sunday Service

by Kandy Schroder

Background Information

This Camping Sunday service focuses on what our camps are about, and how we as Christians go about delivering God's message through outdoor ministry. Each United Church camp is an individual place of worship with different ways of delivering God's message and different gifts to offer, but we all share one common goal: to ensure inclusion in a world where exclusion has been the norm.

This Camping Sunday service relays how, through dedicated individuals, the United Church ministers to children, youth, young adults, and adults in a non-traditional church setting—our camps.

Music suggestions are offered throughout the order of service. I suggest you integrate any action songs to get your congregations into the camp spirit!

You Will Need

- symbols that represent your camp and its individuality
- pictures of children, youth, young adults, adults, and families at camp

“Our Camps: What a Perfect Place to Worship,” a Service for Camping Sunday

Music Prelude

Silent Thoughts and Prayers

As we gather today to worship the Word of God, remember those who spread his Word in a perhaps unconventional place of worship, the United Church camps. Think of how God's presence fills the fresh air. Think of the sounds that are at hand—the children laughing, the joyous singing, the camaraderie—all in the name of our beloved God. Remember how you felt the last time you were truly at one with nature. Did you feel closer to God, did you wonder how all this glorious scenery came to be, or did the pure silence scare you? Think of God's love and how it can be wrapped around you—if you truly let that love in.

Call to Worship (Psalm 67)

One: Be gracious unto us, O God, and bless us; and let the light of your face shine upon us,

All: that your ways may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

One: Let the nations be glad, and sing for joy,

All: for you judge the peoples righteously and guide the nations of the earth.

One: The earth has yielded its harvest, and you, our God, have blessed us.

All: Your blessing, O God, be upon us. May all the ends of the earth revere you.

Opening Prayer

Precious God, giver of life and breath, help us to hear your Word and live your Word throughout our daily lives. Help us to show others your love, help us to accept others and not judge them, help us to teach others how infectious your never-failing trust and love are. We ask you, God, to guide us gently as we make connections through your messages, and we ask that you bless those who so diligently spread your Word.

Opening Hymn/Song

"We Are Marching" (*Voices United* 646)

Children/Family Time

(Use this time to present the children/youth with a gift from your camp. This gift could be a rock from your camp, a copy of favourite camp songs, or a camp brochure.)

(Bring a copy of your camp's schedule. Try to walk the children/youth through a day at camp. Introduce the day's events, the morning prayers, and the activities. Give examples of what the meals might be like. Explain that the camp volunteers (or staff) are there as messengers of God; they're there to make sure everyone feels safe and happy and everyone who comes is an equal once they step onto the camp grounds.)

(Ask the children/youth whether they have any camp experiences they'd like to share or whether they have any favourite camp songs they'd like to sing during this time. Have the whole congregation join in if possible!)

(Close children/family time with one of your night-time vespers, followed by the Lord's Prayer.)

Hymn/Song

"This Little Light of Mine"

Scripture Readings

Acts 9:36–43 Bringing Life to a Believer

Psalms 23 The Good Shepherd

Revelation 7:9–17 People from Every Nation

John 13:31–35 The New Commandment

Hymn/Song

"It Only Takes a Spark" (VU 289)

Meditation: What Are We About?

(As you reflect on the scriptures you have just heard, try to focus on how outdoor ministry relates to them. This is a good time to demonstrate how your camp affects people in your community and your church. Use symbols or pictures of your camp and explain their role or impact—show your congregation what your camp is about! Following is an example of a sermon you may use. Feel free to change the details so it works for your context.)

Our mission at Camp Koolaree is to see the camp used by all people for spiritual, physical, and emotional growth; for leisure and recreation; and for a total living experience. We believe deep spiritual growth can take place in an outdoor wilderness setting, removed from the everyday routine, in the company of others who are seeking recreation in the truest sense. We aim to uphold these goals and endeavour to preserve the natural environment of our God-given heritage. We hope all who use the facilities will share this heritage and glorify God.

How do we ensure we follow this mission statement?

Every year, we have families and children of all kinds come to our camp. Regardless of their gender, economic status, or religious background, once they step off the boat, they all become equals. The careful selection of camp volunteers guarantees each child is cared for in the same manner—with respect, care, and love—and that helps children work through a week away from the comforts of home, or away from whatever demons they may face on a daily basis.

Each day starts out with the optional polar bear swim in the cold waters of Kootenay Lake. Then it's rise and shine for the rest of the campers with a brief meeting at the flagpole. This meeting sets the tone for the day. We have a fun little exercise time, make announcements, and say our prayers for the day to come. During this time, with the sun shining down on our faces and the crisp morning air waking us up, we know God is truly with us, will help us guide the campers through the daily lessons, and will help us conquer the struggles of the day.

Our flagpole traditions include:

- The Canadian flag: Behold our emblem, two colours for us to cherish: red for courage, white for purity. We pledge allegiance to this flag, to the dominion for which it stands, and for the world friendship that is to be.

- The Christian flag: Three colours for us to cherish: red for courage, white for purity, blue for faithfulness and sincerity. We pledge allegiance to this flag and to the high ideals for which it stands.

For many of us, there is no place closer to God than in a setting where there are no electronics, no phones, no bullies, and no stigma attached to our status. There is only fresh air, nature, and an equality that cannot be matched. We know the Holy Spirit dwells within us when we see the looks on the beautiful little faces as they liven up at the breakfast table, filling their tummies with nourishment for the day and giggling all the while.

This is not unique to Camp Koolaree. This is what United Church camping is all about—outreach. It's about showing the youth, children, and families that we care. We care enough to share a part of our lives with them, we care enough to make sure they're not hungry at the end of the day, we care enough to make sure no one is excluded from the enjoyment that a church camp brings, and we care enough to strive to bring them back for that small piece of heaven year after year. It's about showing the campers there is a God, and we're there to help them see that.

Each day is a new day at camp, and we cherish it as such.

When we look around the camp, we see examples of individuals, symbols, and places that come to provide memories that are everlasting:

- The owl: This is an emblem of the camp fraternity.
- The cross: This reminds us of Jesus' presence and reminds us to treat others as we would like to be treated.
- The campers at play: No explanation needed here!
- The chapel: The saying at the entrance is "Be Still, and Know the Lord." This is our quiet place at the camp, our place of worship and reflection.

The weeks are filled with spiritual activities, games, water sports, and chapel services. Every night after campfire the campers fall into their beds, many too exhausted to stand, but not wanting the day to end just yet.

And, as the week comes to a close, we see the sadness on everyone's face as campers say goodbye to the friends they have made. We know many of these faces will be back to renew those friendships. We know we, as leaders, have been in the presence of God this week.

Camping Sunday is a day to recall those memories and to celebrate the upcoming season. Camping Sunday is not just about the children who have come to the camp, but about all of us who have experienced United Church camping in our different ways, and the memories we will create for generations to come.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn/Song

"I Danced in the Morning" (VU 352)

Minute for Mission/Offering Invitation

Offering Music

Dedication

Loving God, we ask that you bless the gifts that have been received. We ask that you guide us gently as we use these to do your work in our community and in our world. We give thanks, O God, for the gift of your presence and the gift of our faith. Accept these offerings we give in love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Precious God, we give you thanks for this time of worship. We give you thanks for the opportunity to share with others what our camps are about, and we give you thanks for those who put in countless hours to share your Word and your love with complete strangers.

God, we appreciate the beauty of spring—the new flowers, the buds on the trees, the animals that have come out of hibernation. We appreciate that we will soon be able to share our lives with those who are present at our camps.

God, we ask that you continue to bless us with your grace, that you continue to bless us with the gift of our faith. We ask that you watch over us and keep us strong as we try to do your work on this earth. We ask that you keep our volunteers strong and dedicated, and that you assist them while they teach others the way Jesus taught us to live.

We ask you, God, to bless those who are in need of your love and support right now. In our silent prayers, we ask that you keep watch over those who are sick or in the hospital, those who are facing the loss of a loved one, those who are having difficulties in their homes. We ask, God, that you stay with all of us as we support these people and others in our community and in our world.

Amen.

Closing Hymn/Song

"We Shall Go Out with Hope of Resurrection" (VU 586)

Benediction

As you go out into this world today, think about how you can make a difference. Think about how you can show God's love to all you meet. Go into this world with

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God's love guiding you, and open your hearts to ministering to those in your community who may not always be receptive to traditional ways of worshipping. Go out into this world and spread the love of God!

Music Postlude

***Kandy Schroder** has been a director and board member for Camp Koolaree (Kootenay, B.C.) for over 13 years. She currently directs both Novice and Jr. Girls Camps. As a member of Trail United Church, Trail, B.C. Kandy also teaches Sunday school and is involved in community youth outreach programs.*