

Ideas for Camping Sunday

Each year, the final Sunday in April is designated in the United Church as national Camping Sunday. The worship service and activities on this Sunday are designed to increase visibility for the church's ministry of residential camping, draw attention to local United Church camps, and help people recall their memories and experiences of church camping. To download a copy of the 2010 Camping Sunday Service, see www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/camping.

1. Contribute an Article

Provide an article on the value of camping ministry for your Conference, presbytery, or congregational newsletter or website.

- Write your own article on local camp(s) highlighting personal stories from camp staff, volunteers, parents of campers, and/or campers themselves. If you do this, please share it with the General Council Office by e-mailing it to camping@united-church.ca. We would love to be able to post it online to share with the wider church and camping community.
- There are some excellent resources in the *We Are Camp* print resource and 2010 special edition of *Camping News*. Additional United Church resources are posted online at www.united-church.ca/exploring/camping.

You are welcome to reprint articles from these resources, as long as you give credit to the source, e.g., "The Gift of United Church Camping" by James Patterson, reprinted with permission from *Camping News*, 2010 Special Edition (The United Church of Canada) pp. 8–9.

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2. Additional Ideas for Camping Sunday

Recruit former/current camp staff, board, campers to help with some of the following:

- Ask the church to make an announcement for two or three weekends before Camping Sunday, encouraging folks to "dress down," or invite former campers in the congregation to "dress down" and perhaps wear their camp T-shirts
- Teach camp songs to the congregation
- Introduce camp traditions (i.e., cup stacking)
- Interview former or current campers during the service
- Host a luncheon or potluck after the service with special activities for the children/youth
- Invite the local community to attend, sending special invitations to last year's campers
- Offer a Mug-up after church with s'mores, etc.
- Decorate your local church with outdoor materials

3. A Sample Camping Sunday Program—The Crusader Program

The Crusader Program (courtesy of the Outdoor Ministries Committee, Maritime Conference) was designed to do promotion where it was most needed—in congregations whose members knew little or nothing about camping. It also provided reminders to congregations that are big supporters of camp. The primary source of the program's success was camp alumni. These "crusaders" volunteer to visit a congregation on a Sunday morning and promote camp to the congregation through a camp display and a presentation. The more alumni you can enlist, the fewer weeks will be involved in spreading the word! The program has two components: the Full Meal Deal and the Snack Pack.

a. The Full Meal Deal

The Full Meal Deal is intended for congregations that have little or no involvement in camp, and is intended to be an in-depth presentation of what camp is, what campers can expect from their experience, and how congregations can help. The alumni or “crusaders” who volunteer to go to churches bring display materials to set up in the entrance of the church for people to see as they enter. Display could be poster boards with camp photographs, brochures, and general information about the camps. Those alumni who volunteered usually used their own photos along with the regular written materials camps give out.

During the church service the crusaders would make a brief presentation to the congregation about what the camp is, its relationship to the presbytery, the activities offered, and the economical (as well as spiritual) advantages of sending children to camp. The presentation could include a PowerPoint presentation or short video. Following the presentation, crusaders would go to the children’s program time (church school/Sunday school) to teach a few camps songs and games and even do a craft if there was time. After the service the crusaders would stay during the fellowship time to answer questions.

Crusaders could use the suggestions in the Camping Sunday service “We Are Church—We Are Camp.” Rather than the congregation having the responsibility of leading a service about a camp they know little about, experienced people could bring their expertise to this service.

b. The Snack Pack

The Snack Pack is intended for congregations that have traditionally been active supporters of camping through volunteer help, monetary donations, and the number of campers sent from the congregation. The display materials for the Snack Pack are the same as for the Full Meal Deal, but the congregational presentation is much shorter, more of a reminder to celebrate the positive relationship between the church and the camp.

Organizing the Crusader Program

In order to set this program up, a camp board needs a central person to act as organizer. The hardest part is tracking down alumni who could give up a Sunday morning or two to help deliver the program. However, in today’s techno-savvy world, this is not as hard as it once was. Camps often have Facebook pages set up for alumni. This, and other forums, is a great way to track down alumni who might be willing to lend a hand spreading the word.

Once volunteers are lined up, a meeting should be held to determine dates for visits, and agree on what type of information should be given during the longer and shorter presentations.

Divide volunteers up between congregations in a way that works for you. We paired volunteers for visits and tried to match them with home congregations and congregations geographically close to where they lived.

Our volunteers were responsible for contacting their assigned churches and setting up a visit within the timeline we had set out as a group. (We chose the three months before camping season began). However, it may be easier to have one organizer set up the times with the congregations.