

# CAMPING SUNDAY SERVICE

*April 27, 2008*

By Gordon Dunbar

## **Background Information:**

The following service for Camping Sunday can be used in its entirety or sections that fit your own context can be used. The intention of the service is to focus primarily on the scripture from Acts 17:22–31, flowing from the idea that Paul’s preaching about the unknown god was an effort to enter into the Greek religious context in order to proclaim the gospel. Indeed, camps endeavour to connect with the contextual reality of the campers and lead them into relationship with God and with each other. Thus, Paul’s approach is rooted in relationship—the very relationship for which we are created in God’s image. Throughout the service this theme of right relationship affirms the goal of camping as a place where healthy relationships are fostered as the gospel is proclaimed. All of those relationships are nurtured and guided by the Spirit’s help (John 14:15–21).

The music suggestions are offered within the service liturgy itself. You will notice that there are suggestions from *Voices United*, from *More Voices*, and from various other sources. Choose what you feel will work best within your own context, but be aware how powerfully the songs sung at camp connect with the children and youth. Only the titles of camp songs are included. Check with someone from a camp near you to provide the words and music. Please keep in mind copyright laws regarding photocopying and public use of words and music. If you can make the arrangements, get some camp staff from a local United Church camp to help with the leadership for the service. What better way to encourage the thriving ministry camps provide than through relationships built in such a manner?

## **Camping Sunday Liturgy**

### **GOD GATHERS US**

#### **Prelude**

#### **Call to Worship and Prayer of Approach** *(loosely based on Psalm 66:8–20)*

*One:* *Do you hear it? Can you feel it?*

**All:** **Do we hear what? Can we feel what?**

*One:* *Rustling through tree branches;  
tickling the hairs on bare arms and exposed necks.*

**All:** **What is it?**

*One:* *The Spirit breathes into our hearts and invites us to listen and to come.*

**All:** **Okay, but to what is the Spirit inviting us?**

*One:* *You came, this morning, for what?*

**Children:** **To play and to laugh and to hear the stories of Jesus.**

**Women:** **To find a spacious, holy place of equity and respect.**

**Men:** **To rest from self-imposed burdens in Jesus’ arms.**

**All:** **To reconnect with friends and families and God.**  
*One:* *To those desires deep in your hearts, God is listening, affirming the covenant of faith gathering us all together.*

**All:** **Yes! That’s what we want: time with God—together.**  
*One:* *Then let us join together in prayer:*

**All:** **We come fully into your heart, O God,  
 for we yearn to feel your movement within,  
 to hear your Spirit’s leading in times of challenge,  
 to understand the stories of your reign of right relation,  
 to learn from the very ground of our being—you.  
 We come at your invitation with joyful praise. Amen.**

**Hymn:** *Select one hymn from the songs listed below, or two camp songs.*

*Voices United:* #374, “Come and Find a Quiet Centre”; #376, “Spirit of the Living God”; #217, “All Creatures of Our God and King”; #187, “The Spring Has Come.”  
*More Voices:* #1, “Let Us Build a House”; #12, “Come Touch Our Hearts”; #26, “Your Love Is Amazing!”; #37, “Each Blade of Grass.”  
*Praise Songs:* “Better Is One Day, Big House” (change phrase “my Father’s” to “God’s perfect”); “Open the Eyes of My Heart” (by Paul Baloche); “Come, Now Is the Time to Worship.”

**Children’s Moment:**

Do you remember the first time you tried to stand on your head, somersault backwards, ride a bike, or climb a tree? Have children share their experiences.

Who helped you learn to do these things? Do you think it was easier to learn with someone else’s help? Why?

Have the children take you on a trust walk around the sanctuary, wearing a blindfold.

Talk about the difference it makes when we have someone helping us to do difficult or challenging things like standing on our head or riding a bike.

In conversation, draw the children out to try to cover the following elements of relationship lived out in a faith community:

- a) Jesus turns the world upside down and offers a different way of living
- b) It takes a whole community working together, to help us live Jesus’ way

**Prayer of Confession** *(based loosely on 1 Peter 3:13–22)*

*One:* *Do you ever feel at times like the whole world is against you?*  
**All:** **Sure, but I try to do and to say the right things.**  
*One:* *Isn’t it just easier sometimes to cave in, and take the easy path?*  
**All:** **I have to admit, there have been times....**  
*One:* *And?*

**All: Then I suffer even more,  
for it seems that when I do evil I hurt more.  
I feel separated from God and from others.**

*One: So there have been times when you've chosen the wrong path?*

**All: There have.**

*One: How's it feel?*

**All: Awful! I want that feeling taken away.  
I want to feel clean once more.**

*One: Me too, so let's lay down the burden of brokenness,  
confessing them to God in prayer.*

*(Silent Prayer)*

## **GOD SPEAKS TO US IN WORD**

**Assurance of Grace** *(based loosely on 1 Peter 3:13–22)*

*One: How do you feel now?*

**All: I feel more peaceful, more centred, more alive.**

*One: Why?*

**All: In laying myself open and vulnerable to God,  
I found unconditional love and an invitation into wholeness.**

*One: Was it like receiving baptism into a renewed relationship?*

**All: Yes, like Jesus' own Spirit was blowing out the cobwebs of certainty  
and leading me into a place of new life and of discovery.**

*One: Sounds scary...*

**All: Maybe so, but I'm not alone,  
for the risen Christ walks with and in me.**

*One: Cool!*

**All: Amen!**

**Scripture** John 14:15–21

**Hymn:** *Select one hymn from the songs listed below, or two camp songs.*

*Voices United:* #560, "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee"; #603, "In Loving Partnership We Come"; #600, "When I Needed a Neighbour."

*More Voices:* #45, "You Are Holy"; #63, "Long Before My Journey's Start"; #81, "Love Us onto Fullness."

*Praise Songs:* "I'm Trading My Sorrows (Yes Lord)", "Breathe," "Everyday."

**Scripture** Acts 17:22–31

**Ministry of Music**

**Sermon:** All You Need Is Love *(Choose what you feel will work best within your own context.)*

Camp is contextual, a place of intensive, immersion experiences of community, lived out in the midst of God's good creation, which focuses the campers, the staff, and the parents upon the relational nature of life and of faith. It is an environment in which the diverse backgrounds of all the participants contribute to the rich ferment of the experience.

Just as Paul relates in the preaching recorded in Acts 17:22–31, the kind of intense, immersion experience Jesus offers is one which unifies people of diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the love into which believers are invited is one which is inspired (in-breathed) by the Spirit of the living God (John 14:15–21), the God of Creation. As such, it turns the world upside down, changing our perspective so that we can love our enemies instead of hating them—a relationship rooted in self-giving, just as Jesus gave of himself.

In addition, to help out with painting a clearer picture of the camping environment, here is an illustration of the kind of community, of the kind of relation, camp can (and often does) foster: *(If you prefer not to use either of these story options, contact your local camp, or ask the members in your church to share stories from camp)*

**Story Option #1:** The little guy was seven years old and this was his first experience at a United Church camp. He already really liked his counsellor, Ian who had grown up at United Church camps. But on this first night the kids just wouldn't settle down, especially one unruly child. After repeated requests to go to sleep, Ian was exasperated and shouted "Go to sleep NOW!" Then he went around the cabin tucking in the covers at each bunk leaving the unruly boy until last. To Ian's dismay, tears were rolling down the boy's cheeks. Ian felt terrible. The very first night and already he had made a kid cry.

When he asked the little guy why he was crying, the kid asked "Are you tucking me in?" Baffled by the question, Ian simply answered "Yes." Still sniffling, the little boy said, "I've heard about being tucked in, but I never had anyone do it." Sobering isn't it? Seven years old and no one had ever tucked him in before.

Ian made sure that young fellow got tucked in every night, because Ian remembered how important camp had been for him as a youngster. In fact, Ian gave his United Church camp a lot of credit for helping him to grow up and to become the confident and faithful young man he now was. When summer was over, Ian spoke to his congregation one Sunday morning and told them about this little seven-year old. Then he said, "If it wasn't for Mrs. Lidster's gift to us [he meant the bequest she had left in her will for the congregation to help send kids to camp], that little guy could not have come to camp. Camp changed his life. At the end of the week, that boy told me he couldn't wait until he grew up so he could be a camp counsellor, too."

Ian ended by saying, "Mrs. Lidster's gift changed that kid's life." There were nods in the congregation as old Mr. Renfrew stood up and said, "Mrs. Lidster's bequest not only changed that boy's life, it changed your life too Ian, and it has changed all of us here this morning, just hearing you."

*("Do You Remember Being Tucked in at Night?" by Heather McLean, Gift Planner for Hamilton and London Conferences. Reprinted from Camping News Fall 2007.)*

**Story Option #2:** He picked up a cigarette butt from the sidewalk and lit up using a pilfered lighter—his mom’s. He was a curious five-year old. He smoked his first joint when he was nine, but he had already been drinking the alcohol from his dad’s half-empty bottles for two years. When he did his first line of cocaine at age 11, he knew he had the answer to life. In the midst of those soaring highs he found peace at last: peace from the constant bickering at home; peace from the turmoil of gang violence in Toronto’s public housing projects; peace from doubts about his self-worth. By 12, he was in foster care, a runaway risk, because of the allure of cocaine highs.

I met him last week at a United Church camp. He’s now 15 and he’s suffering in the midst of a battle with himself. He told me that he had accepted Christ into his life two weeks before, that he was trying to do things right. Across the lake from the camp in Beamsville he could see Toronto and he so wanted to run away, to jack a car, to get high again.

“How do you know if God is punishing you?” he asked, his eyes dull, his body slumped, fidgeting in withdrawal. I watched his hands twist against themselves, overwhelmed by inner turmoil. I’d like to be able to say that I spoke calm words of encouragement, just the right phrases suffused with wisdom, but my mind was churning with thoughts about the mind/body/spirit whole, about how devastating a physical addiction, begun at such a young age, would challenge the determination of his spirit to overcome his cravings. I knew it wasn’t a simple task. Praying hard enough wasn’t a complete solution, for he needed more than that. He was in pain and spiritual bromides wouldn’t be enough.

The campers had hiked to a local Roman Catholic church to join together in worship. The first song was “You Are My All in All.” As much as he was caught by the music and lifted to a place of hope, he had trouble hearing the words of the song. The phrases hit him right where he lived. “You are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek... Taking my sin, my cross, my shame... When I fall down, you pick me up... You are my all in all...” (words of song by Dennis Jernigan). He got up, hoodie low over his face, and fled out of the church. I quickly got up to follow him, but one of the staff, a member of my congregation, stopped me and indicated she would accompany him, preventing him from running.

I have no idea what she said in the more than an hour they spent on the front steps of that small country church, but they both came back into the sanctuary near the end of the worship service. He had missed the skit which talked about finding God’s path of faith. He had missed the sermon which talked about the struggles to follow when the going gets tough. He had missed the Sacrament of Communion, the central sign/act of belonging to Christ and becoming a community of faith. He was, however, there to sing the final song of the worship service, “Trading My Sorrows”: “I’m trading my sorrows/I’m trading my shame/I’m laying it down for the joy of the Lord/I’m trading my sickness/I’m trading my pain/I’m laying it down for the joy of the lord” (words by Sonic Flood).

I looked back and saw him singing with a smile on his face, even though he sang through tears. For that moment the battle within, the battle between his body and his spirit, was forgotten. I knew that in the morning, his addiction would raise the spectre of an “easier” way. I prayed that another person would take the time, find the right words, but most of all be with him in his lifelong struggle toward wholeness and health. I had confidence that God would seek the right person and, if that young man accepted the companionship, he would wrestle his addiction to the ground. I had hope

that, like that staff person from our home congregation, another would be open to the Spirit's leading and be the companion he needed.

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD**

**Hymn:** *Select one hymn from the songs listed below, or two camp songs.*

*Voices United:* #606, "In Christ There Is No East or West"; #183, "We Meet You, O Christ"; #649, "Walk With Me."

*More Voices:* #89, "Love Is the Touch"; #94, "Love Knocks and Waits"; #154, "Deep In Our Hearts."

*Camp Songs:* "Creation Calls," "Deep," "Freedom."

### **Presentation of Our Offering**

#### **Offertory Hymn**

#### **Prayer of Dedication** (*in unison*)

**We come together as one, O God, presenting our gifts.  
You call us into discipleship and you send us out to serve,  
so bless us and our gifts,  
that we may tear down walls of injustice,  
that we may walk with those who are wounded,  
that we may love our neighbours as ourselves. Amen.**

#### **Prayers of the People**

Creator God, we open our senses to the world around us, filled with awe.  
In the midst of prairie lands embraced by endless sky,  
when we lift the rich soil to our noses and sniff,  
we smell the life-giving promise of spring.  
Perched atop Rocky Mountain grandeur,  
when we gaze at the vistas of fractured pinnacles,  
we see majestic beauty cradled within danger.  
Canoeing amidst the liquid landscape of lakes, streams and rivers,  
when we raise a cup of pure water to our lips,  
we taste the cleansing from within of our own baptisms.  
Balancing upon the rolling deck of a Maritime fishing boat,  
when we listen to the crashing of the surf on distance shoreline rocks,  
we hear the lullaby of our life's cradle.  
Wrapped warmly against the arctic cold,  
when stinging crystals of icy snow lash our skin,  
we feel the vigour of life coursing in our veins.  
We give you thanks, O God, for the wonder of your Creation.

*(Silent prayer)*

It is in this fertile land we live out our faith at United Church camps.  
When we think of all the youthful enthusiasm camp staff bring to each day's activities,  
we are moved to seek that same enthusiasm in supporting the ministry thriving there.  
When we consider the powerful stories of faith shared, person to person in relationship,  
we are pushed to model our own discipleship on community and on sharing stories.  
When we contemplate the moments of discovery campers encounter each day,  
we are encouraged to rediscover that same wonder in our own lives of faith.  
When we ponder the joyful energy of camp boards joining in skits at campfires,  
we are motivated to sing out in joy as we gather together to worship.  
Whisper to our hearts, O Spirit; in tones of vibrant life-giving faith, we pray.

*(Silent prayer)*

Just like a homesick camper crying out in the night for mom and dad,  
there are times when we feel lonely and afraid.  
Just like a camp staff member who wonders  
how to keep smiling in the midst of heavy fatigue,  
we, too, feel overwhelmed by life's demands while trying to keep it all together.  
Just like the camp board chair wondering where the next day's budget money will come,  
we often find ourselves trapped by despair when confronted by financial hardship.  
Just like an injured camper rushed to the nurse's cabin for treatment,  
we, too, cry tears of worry and of fear at illness, or injury, or disease.  
Embrace us with arms of loving kindness, O Christ, that we may be healed in your name.

*(Silent prayer)*

Hear our prayers, O God, that your Spirit may enliven us as we pray the words Jesus gave:  
***(The Lord's Prayer)*** Our Father . . . Amen.

**Hymn:** *Select one hymn from the songs listed below, or two praise songs.*

*Voices United:* #567, "Will You Come and Follow Me"; #691, "Though Ancient Walls";  
#595, "We Are Pilgrims (The Servant Song)".

*More Voices:* #143, "We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky"; #145, "Draw the Circle Wide";  
#161, "I Have Called You by Your Name"; #209, "Go, Make a Difference."

*Camp Songs:* "Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble," "Shout to the North," "Step By Step."

## **Commissioning**

*One:* *As we breathe, the Spirit breathes in us.*

**All:** **We go forth to share that inspiration with the world.**

*One:* *As we live, the risen Christ lives within us.*

**All:** **We go forth to proclaim the Good News of Jesus.**

*One: As we give of ourselves, God's grace transforms us.*

**All: We go forth to transform the world as disciples,  
one loving relationship at a time.**


## **Benediction**

*One: Now go, as a people gathered by the Sender of Love,  
upheld by the One who came in Love,  
sent out in the Power of Love.  
Go in peace.*

## **Postlude**

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**Gordon Dunbar**, Moorefield-Rothsay United Church (OM) Hamilton Conference. Gord has been involved with United Church camping for decades, most significantly as the Chair of the Camping Sustainability Task Group on which the new Camping Task Group's work is based. His burning passion for camping, and for the powerful, foundational, immersion experience of faith formation it provides, arises out of the United Church's need for a fruitful ground for faith formation and for leadership development, but one which has a more integrated and intentionally thought-through vision nationally. Gord loves fulfilling his call as a minister in rural pastoral ministry, the foundation upon which he rests all other involvements.




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Call for 2006–2008 Nominations    Deadline: June 30, 2008



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