

We Are Church—We Are Camp!

Camping Sunday Service Sunday, April 25, 2010

Introduction: *This service is written as part of the We Are Camp awareness campaign to highlight camping as an invaluable ministry of the church, and as an invitation for camps and congregations to partner with one another to strengthen both of their ministries. Feel free to use the entire service as is, or pick and choose the sections that work for you. Additional ideas are available online at www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/camping.*

Gathering

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!**

(Laura A. Loving, *Celebrate God's Presence*, p. 23, adapted)

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

Opening Prayer

One: Creator of all life, hear our prayer. We seek guidance and wisdom in a world where few lay claim to eternal peace.

All: Grant us the vision to see beyond our own personal struggles, and embrace the vision of strength in unity. Give us the wisdom to know and embrace the gifts you have given us, that we might share those gifts through the ministries of your church.

One: Touch our souls, so that we may spread your message of love and peace for all people. Help us to understand that we are of one body, as your Spirit flows from one to another in a sacred loop.

All: Let the challenges we have faced serve as reminders to us of the strength and grace shown, and inspire us in our work on behalf of people of all ages and stages of life.

One: Cleanse and renew us, so that we may work in order for new generations to thrive. Teach us the true lesson of life, its sacred message of love, to spread freely beyond self and among all.

All: May your Spirit continue to heal and instill within us the meaning of this prayer, and trust that we use it to serve you well. Amen.

We Listen for God's Word

Children's Time: *The following are three options for you to choose from.*

Option 1: The Church

Show the children a variety of photos of groups and people who are active in your church (or introduce people, asking them to stand and stay standing). Introduce the choir, the administrator, the custodian, the minister, the children, the youth, the ushers, the nursery worker, the youth/children's leaders, etc.

Tell the children that all of these people make the church work. Take away the photo of the choir (or ask the choir to sit down) and ask what would be missing if they weren't part of us. Do the same with each of the assembled photos/standing people. Emphasize that the church needs everyone to create the community and support the ministry of the church. Pray together for all people of the church community.

Option 2: The Camp

Do a similar activity with pictures of a nearby camp. If you remove the dining hall, what would be missing from the camp experience? If you remove the cabins, what would be missing? What if you remove the counsellors, or the children? Be sure to include a photo of the church. If you remove the church from the camp, what would be missing?

Pray together, giving thanks for camp and the ways that church and camp can work together to make something beautiful.

Option 3: A Beautiful Scene

Bring a photo of a beautiful place in the world (perhaps cut out from a magazine): a beach scene, a mountain, a forest, etc. Show it to the children and admire its beauty together. Ask a child what his/her favourite part of the picture is. With scissors (or just by tearing), remove part of the picture and hand it to the child. Repeat, asking different children to name their favourite part of what is left and handing pieces to them until little is left of the photo.

Now ask how they like the photo with all these various parts removed. Invite them to put the photo back together (you may wish to have some Bristol board and transparent tape available). Emphasize that all parts together are what make the picture beautiful. Pray, giving thanks to God for the beauty of creation and for God's help in the actions we take to preserve creation.

Camp Reflections: Show a portion of the *We Are Camp* DVD and/or a PowerPoint show or DVD of your local camp.

Scripture

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burnt. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good.

—Nehemiah 2:17–18 (NRSV)

As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

—1 Corinthians 12:20–25 (NRSV)

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

Message: We Are Church—We Are Camp!

The children’s time this morning, along with the scriptures we just heard, focused on the fact that working together as a team—rather than working alone in isolation—is vital in the life of the church. In the church there are no superstars, only team members performing their own unique roles, sharing their spiritual gifts in ministry with others.

God calls all of us as members of the body of Christ. Some of us can do one task; some can do another. As the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we would ever dream possible working alone. Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ.

Our reading this morning from the Old Testament spoke of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Nehemiah had a vision, and he shared it with enthusiasm, inspiring Jerusalem’s leaders to rebuild the walls. The spark of his vision ignited the people he gathered around him.

Today we hope to challenge you as a congregation, and as individuals, to work together with Camp _____ so that we might strengthen both our ministries, working together to accomplish something wonderful.

The New Testament reading reminds us that the individual parts of the body are useless without the other parts. If we work together—as a camp and as a congregation—our efforts will be multiplied. Collectively we can allow Jesus to build a more beautiful congregation, and a more wonderful camp—both ministries where the values we uphold as Christians are shared and lived out in community.

Thousands of people in the church make camp possible for others. They include congregations, camp board members, clergy, leaders, staff, campers, those who are physically at the camp, and those who support it from a distance. All of them make a conscious choice to answer the call to build and rebuild, to create and re-create.

Today, there is amazing work being carried on in many congregations and by dedicated children and youth leaders across the country. Many of our churches have growing children and youth ministries—but other churches are asking the question, “How do we bring children and youth into our church?”

The partnership between local congregations and camp ministries underlies an amazing, long-term system for the development of faith and spiritual leaders. Camp has made such a difference in the lives of so many children, young teens, youth, young adults, families, adults, and seniors.

Many active church leaders can point to their time at camp as a key turning point in their faith journey and where they learned and practiced important leadership skills. Our former Moderator, David Giuliano, and our current Moderator, Mardi Tindal, are just two examples. I’m sure you know many more.

In the past, partnerships between camps and congregations were steady and strong. That’s how many camps were started and staffed. Camp leaders would return home and continue to support the campers in their home communities and churches.

Today, close to 50% of campers come from other denominations or from no faith background. What happens when they return home? Who nurtures the seeds of faith growing within them? Conscious, intentional connections between camps and local United Church congregations would be a great benefit to both ministries.

We Are Church—We Are Camp

Last summer, through the “I Am Camp” postcard campaign, campers shared what they loved most about United Church Camping with Nora Sanders, General Secretary of the General Council. Nora received close to 4,000 postcards from campers, parents of campers, and camp staff. I’d like to share a few of those comments with you:

- Camp is why I joined the United Church.
- Camp was the start of my journey to become a minister.
- Camp changed my life.
- Camp is home.
- Camp = Life
- Camp makes me want to be a better person throughout the whole year.
- I don’t know where I would be or what kind of person I would have become without all the love and support I’ve received from the people here. Thank you.
- Camp developed me into who I am today in regard to 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.
- 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.
- What I love most about camp is... “Dirty laundry from happy kids” and “Seeing my children smile non-stop!”
- At camp I love watching children discover their inner beauty and God’s eternal love

Here are some practical steps that you as a congregation can take that would make a real difference.

1. Energetically encourage children, youth, and adults to participate in United Church camps and create ways to be aware of who attends from your church and your community.
2. Develop ongoing strategies for welcoming those who return and provide opportunities to hear about the highlights of their experiences. Show that you care by celebrating what is important to them.
3. Be intentional about incorporating meaningful aspects of the camp experience into the local church setting to build on the seeds of faith that have been planted. This may be a song that the congregation can learn, symbols of the camp experience in the worship setting, sermon or study topics, testimonies and stories, or the chance to use new leadership skills in the local church community.
4. Perhaps the most beneficial step a congregation can make is to participate in camp events and develop partnerships with camp staff. The connections you will make with the participants themselves can have lifelong implications. Rarely will you have the opportunity to develop the depth of relationships with people from your congregation and beyond. Living together in Christian community for an extended period of time at a camp opens many doors.
5. See camp ministry as an important extension of your own congregation’s ministry. Get involved and support it with your prayers, your presence, your service, and your gifts. Watch lives change before your eyes as they become open to the moving of the Spirit in these special settings.

We invite you to link hands with us at Camp _____ so that we might strengthen each other’s ministries and better serve the children and youth in our care.

(Add other invitations that are applicable to your camp/church:

- *We invite you as a congregation to experience the joy of rest and rejuvenation by holding your next church retreat at Camp _____.*
- *We invite you to our Spring Open House to be held on _____)*

We Are Church—We Are Camp

A church in B.C. is currently asking for donations from their members to purchase a soccer ball for their local camp. Yes, *one* soccer ball. It's a small, struggling congregation, but they're determined to give something to the camp—and hope they might get enough money to buy two soccer balls.

Whether it's people giving their time helping out at our camp's spring clean-up, making a small or large financial gift or bequest, donating of sports equipment or used furniture, or praying for the camp staff, volunteers and campers—every gift counts.

Every part of the body of Christ is needed, every spiritual gift is needed, as we work together to strengthen our ministries, and in particular our ministry to children and youth.

Hymn: “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

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 attended other types of camps. Be open to stories that reflect warm and wonderful memories, as well as stories that are less positive.

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

Offertory Hymn: “Dance with the Spirit” (MV 156), or
“Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

Closing Prayer

Closing Hymn: “Christ Has No Body Now but Yours” (MV 171), or
“Will You Come and Follow Me” (VU 567)

Benediction