

Camps Connect with Communities

An important feature of these two United Church camps is the way they relate to their communities.

West Haven United Church Camp: People Working Together

By Ryan Belbin

[West Haven United Church Camp](#) was built by people working together, sharing experiences and communal spiritual growth. This remains a guiding principle of the camp to this day, and it is because of this that it continues to flourish.

Separated from Pasadena on the west coast of Newfoundland and Labrador by a winding dirt road, an expanse of trees, and Deer Lake's cool waters, West Haven appears isolated. But if you were to wander onto the site during the summer months, you would feel the fellowship of one of the many groups that use the campsite. Perhaps you would hear the rhythmic pounding of hammers and the grinding of saws as a group of volunteers gathers for a maintenance weekend and barbecue. You might even be lucky enough to hear the exuberant shrieks of children playing a game of capture the flag.

There are two practical necessities that any organization needs to sustain itself: money and time. When that organization is a volunteer-run United Church camp, support from neighbouring congregations and the general public becomes crucial. Fortunately, West Haven has developed an extensive network of support that has been essential in preserving the current camp environment and allowing for subsequent improvements.

During the last two summer seasons alone, local men's clubs have donated two new canoes to the camp. Additional donations include fridges, stoves, a washer, and a dryer for the on-site kitchen. Besides much-needed equipment donations, the camp is also sustained by charitable donations of money, as well as United Church sponsorship programs that enable children from lower-income families to experience the enriching community of West Haven.

Groups that regularly assist the camp include United Church congregations, UCW groups, and AOTS/men's clubs. The Christian Development Committee of West District also provides direct financial support, as does Newfoundland and Labrador Conference. These gestures have allowed the camp board to make purchases to improve the camping experience and hire annual staff, while keeping fees relatively low. Camp should not be a place where anyone needs to worry about paying the bills. Thanks to the financial support of so many different individuals within the church community, it does not have to be a concern for West Haven either.

The highest quality resources are nothing without the tireless hours that people are willing to invest during the year. This starts at the camp's board of directors, which is comprised of community and ministerial volunteers from all over the West District of Newfoundland and Labrador. The board meets regularly to provide the necessary oversight and guidance of the camp's functions.

Volunteer assistance reaches far beyond the meeting table, however. Congregations from the tip of the great Northern Peninsula to southern Port aux Basques actively promote West Haven. Every camping season sees full bunkhouses of children from all areas of the province. These congregations also provide the leadership required for a successful camping experience. This includes the volunteer counsellors-in-training, the paid program staff, as well as the parents, teachers, clergy, and community members who assume the roles of adult volunteers and camping directors. Without these people, the camping season could simply not exist in the capacity that it does today.

The influence of this network of community volunteers is also felt on a much subtler level. Although the camping season is determined by the calendar, volunteer maintenance workers and groups from within the United Church community and the overall public assemble regularly throughout the year to improve the trail network and buildings, clean up the property, and ensure the quality condition of West Haven. Finally, the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference webmaster makes West Haven's information available online.

Since its inception nearly 50 years ago, West Haven has changed dramatically. The property has been improved and the faces and campfire songs have changed with each passing summer, but the network of community congregations, organizations, and individuals that has always been at the centre of the operation has only grown stronger. Every year new friendships are made and old ones solidified. These continue to build a camping family that goes well beyond the dirt road, trees, and lake of West Haven United Church Camp.

Camp Hurlburt: A Partner in Mission

by Blair Odney

While congregations across the country struggle for consistency and relevance in their ministries with children, youth, young adults, and their families, the church's camping ministry has taken hundreds of thousands of children and youth on all kinds of adventures of the Spirit. In 2008 alone, three camps in south central British Columbia under the supervision of Kamloops Okanagan Presbytery welcomed more than 1,000 children and youth to their facilities.

[Camp Hurlburt](#) is one of those camps. Owned by Trinity United Church in Vernon, British Columbia, and operated by a committee of church volunteers, the camp is a 2.5 acre stretch of beachfront property where thousands of children over the past 75 years have learned what it means to be a blessing.

About nine years ago the congregation began to grow distant from this ministry. The camp program began to forget why it was connected to The United Church of Canada. Volunteers were tired; 60-year-old buildings were beginning to show their age. Making matters worse, the Trinity congregation was beginning to feel some stewardship pinches, not the least of which was trying to pay off a mortgage on a 16-year-old building.

Responding to a challenge in 2003, Trinity entered into an 18-month discernment process with the presbytery to determine what to do with the camp. Not only did the Outdoor Ministry Task

Force discern that Trinity was indeed called to be in relationship with children and youth through outdoor ministry, but the congregation discerned a call to completely refurbish and redevelop the site.

Trinity decided the real value of Camp Hurlburt lies in its history and its passion for helping children and youth discover who they are as children of God. The congregation asserted that even though the camp sits only 15 minutes away from Vernon's downtown core, there were more important things to do with the property than turn it into a beachfront condo development.

Following an extensive mission planning process from 2005–2007, Trinity discerned that its top priority was to be in honest, authentic relationships with children, youth, young adults, and their families. It also realized that after 75 years of faithful commitment to similar relationships, Camp Hurlburt might have something to teach the congregation about how to do that, and the camp should become central to fulfilling this strategy.

The church identified a new vision. Trinity United Church: one congregation, working from two locations, engaged in sacred relationships. The first goal in this vision was to ensure both the church facility and the camp were safe: spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Having built a worship and Christian education facility only 16 years before, the church building in Vernon was in pretty good shape. Camp Hurlburt was a different story. While the camp could deliver on spiritual and emotional safety, the overall physical safety of the camp came into question. A new way of delivering this ministry needed to be developed. It would be necessary to completely rebuild the camp at a cost of nearly \$3 million. The congregation decided to move forward.

While the congregation began to express its own confidence in this new mission, social service clubs, agencies, and organizations that work for the social development of children and youth also caught wind of this vision. With 90 percent of campers coming from Vernon and immediate outlying areas, Camp Hurlburt became known as "Vernon's camp for kids." When the community learned that the camp was to be rebuilt and that Trinity United had committed \$500,000 to the rebuilding and \$100,000 to an endowment fund that would help maintain a new facility, the community was not long in coming to the support of the camp.

Two businesspeople came forward, both former campers at Camp Hurlburt who are not part of the congregation. When they saw that Trinity was serious about putting its own money and mission on the line, they agreed to find the balance of the rebuilding funds within the city of Vernon through gifts of money and products, special events, and foundations. That campaign is currently underway. When it's completed, the rebuilt camp is slated to be the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified camp in Canada.

When Trinity's mission is accomplished, we will see a community of people:

- living as followers of Jesus Christ, practising what that means
- living our core values in everyday life
- engaging in sacred relationships with people of all ages, inside and outside the church
- embracing a new understanding of the nature of sacred place in their lives, particularly in the two locations of our ministries
- living with awe, wonder, and respect in creation, as stewards of the earth

- living in the world with an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity
- living in the world with an attitude of curiosity rather than judgment

Camp Hurlburt is central to fulfilling this vision.