

Faith Formation at Camp



March 2025

Guiding Principles for Faith Formation provided to camp boards, Regional Council staff, camp directors, Christian education program leaders, camp chaplains, and all who are actively engaged as leaders with or at camps and outdoor ministries of The United Church of Canada.



**The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada**

Faith Formation at Camp (February 2011, December 2014, March 2025)



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The United Church of Canada
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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FAITH FORMATION AT CAMP

1. PERSONAL MEANING

Provide campers with opportunities to gain personal meaning through discovering, naming, claiming, and celebrating their God-given gifts and talents.

2. CREATIVITY

Promote creativity and a camper's sense of wonder, by allowing time and supplies for campers to create something new.

3. MERCY & JUSTICE

Provide campers with occasions to find meaning in the community as they engage in acts of mercy and justice.

4. TRADITIONS & RITUALS

Develop traditions and rituals that enhance inclusion as they point toward something larger than individual concerns.

5. ENVIRONMENT & CARE OF CREATION

Encourage wonder and deepen campers' awareness of the environment and respect for nature.

6. SABBATH

Offer campers opportunities to experience Sabbath as they step away from the hectic, chaotic way of life that is part of today's society.

7. QUESTIONING

Invite questions from the everyday to the mysterious.

8. LEADERSHIP

Develop leaders and enhance leadership qualities among staff and campers.



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Introduction

Welcome to the updated guide to Faith Formation at Camp!

The United Church of Canada is committed to deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice. Camps provide a unique opportunity for young people to dive deeply into what it means to be deep, bold, and daring. We celebrate the ministry of United Church Camps and outdoor ministries! This document is meant to support camp boards, Regional Council staff, camp directors, chaplains, and all staff and volunteers engaged as leaders at camp. In addition to providing a means to engage the Guiding Principles, it will

- help ensure quality faith formation programming
- create continuity of faith content across United Church camps, standardizing the Christian education aspect
- supply a framework for decisions on purchasing, planning, and creating faith formation programming at camp
- provide guidelines for including faith language in all aspects of camp programming
- provide camp staff and boards with some helpful resources for encouraging faith formation at camp

The guiding principles have been developed to help Regional Councils and camps develop or choose curricula for faith formation/Christian education programs. They are not a program that camps must follow, but are meant as a guide for camps that are developing a program to help campers grow in faith and become more aware of their spiritual nature. The principles provide a framework to carry out faith formation and spiritual development according to each camp's structure and organization.

Camp accreditors will use the guiding principles as a means of measuring whether or not the faith formation/Christian education component of the camping standards is met. The camping standards do not, however, include an evaluative standard for the *content* of faith formation programs at camp. It is not within the General Council's purview to prescribe curricula to be followed in camping programs.

United Church camps provide faith formation programs that allow for diversity of spiritual and faith experience. We hope that these guiding principles will assist camps in achieving this goal as they develop their programs.

Background

What Is Faith Formation at Camp?

Faith formation programming teaches campers that faith is a central part of having fun, living in community, building relationships, and caring for creation.

Faith formation at camp is the steady growth of building relationships with self, others, creation and God—in community. It is experienced as a powerful undercurrent in every camp program and activity. Faith formation also happens in structured ways through activities and programs like morning watch, vespers, and Christian education programs (known by such names as Discovery, Rediscovery, and so on).

The Big Picture

By understanding faith formation to be both a powerful undercurrent and a structured program, we are able to embrace the broad impact it has on campers:

- *Building relationships:* Campers are known by name, accepted, and valued. Through the relationships experienced with staff and other campers, through the words spoken and the actions perceived, campers learn that God loves them too.
- *Experiencing community:* Campers feel they belong in a welcoming camp community that is safe and inclusive of all people. They experience the love of God through those around them.
- *Integrating faith with life:* Campers learn about God through structured faith formation programming, at morning watch, and at vespers. Through the rest of the camp's programs and activities, and in relationship with staff and other campers, campers learn that God is alive in people's actions and words. They learn that God is present with them whether they're having fun with friends, climbing ropes, or sitting quietly. The words of faith start to make sense in their everyday life.
- *Identifying and affirming gifts in community:* Campers are strengthened, supported, and equipped at camp, as new skills are developed and affirmed by the community. Campers feel that their life is valued, acknowledged, and celebrated.
- *Encouraging discipleship:* The relationships formed at camp often continue long after camp is over. Campers continue their journey in faith knowing that others are walking along similar paths. Their learning about sharing and giving at camp becomes the gift of sharing with others in the home setting.

By experiencing faith being spoken of and lived out in *all* camp activities, campers learn that God is interested in and present during all aspects of their life—hanging out, going to school, and so on. Camp can provide youth with the tools they need to develop a meaningful faith and learn to integrate faith and a relationship with God into their everyday life.

Talking about faith to a group of children or youth who come from a variety of backgrounds is a challenge. Faith formation at camp, rooted in the Christian tradition, means helping young people to think about their spirituality and faith, and to learn how to integrate it into their daily lives back home. In the words of young campers, it means

- *experiencing* church and our faith
- *practising*, rather than preaching
- *standing up*, rather than sitting down

Whatever a camp chooses to do, it is saying something about the faith of The United Church of Canada. Its programming is an opportunity to teach campers that this faith is about meaning, creativity, justice, tradition, care of creation, rest, and the freedom to question, within relationships and community. At United Church camps, God is a welcome and active participant.

Diversity in Programming

United Church camps go through an accreditation process that requires them to fulfill certain standards, including Theological Values standards. The intent of the administrative standards is to ensure that a safe environment, in all forms, is fostered at United Church camps. This includes a faith formation program that allows for diversity of spiritual and faith experience.

As Brian Platt wrote in *The Observer* (June 2009), the problem with everything the United Church does is that since we accept that faith “doesn’t come packaged in boxes,” we also have to accept diversity in programming standards. United Church camps vary in the type of faith formation programming they provide, just like congregational Sunday schools do. As the writer went on to say, the freedom to express and live out our faith in diverse ways is a good thing. United Church camps determine how to share and live their faith, and the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation are meant to help camps in this important work.

Faith Formation: A Camp Standard

The 2022 edition of the *Camping Standards Manual* provides the following Theological Rationale for faith formation at United Church camps.

Theological Rationale

We are not alone, we live in God's world. The opening words from the United Church's New Creed remind us that God is present in the world and in our lives; God's activity and loving hand is made known to us through the beauty of creation and through the people around us. Church camping ministry is a unique way in which our church can share and celebrate God's presence in the world.

...to live with respect in Creation... At camp, people of various ages and stages gather to share in Christian community. They eat together, cook and clean together, work and learn together, disagree and laugh together. They swim in lakes and seas, gather around fires, walk in woods, and gaze at stars. In the faces of those around them, in the stillness of quiet moments alone, and in the struggles and joys of community, people meet God.

...to love and serve others... United Church camping is a ministry that touches the lives of thousands of children, teens, young adults, adults, and seniors every year. It is a ministry the church celebrates and supports. If camp is to be a place of ministry and meeting God, campers, volunteers, staff, and camp boards must feel nurtured, valued, and safe.

...to seek justice and resist evil... The church is obligated to ensure that camp facilities meet reasonable and recognized safety standards, and that the staff is trained and able to care for campers responsibly and lovingly.

...to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. The church is committed to offering quality Christian education programs, consistent with United Church culture and tradition. Camps provide an environment of safety, love, respect, and community, where Christ's loving presence can be celebrated and shared.

Mission Statement and Theological Values Standards

1. The camp has a mission statement that is available to staff, volunteers, campers, and families in written form or publicly posted (property, website, brochures).
2. The mission statement is reviewed, at minimum, every three years as documented in board minutes.
3. The camp mission statement is included as part of staff training.
4. The faith foundation of the camp is clearly reflected in the promotion of the camp (printed materials, website, mission statement).
5. The camp includes a Christian education/faith formation program that reflects the theology, practices, and beliefs of The United Church of Canada.
6. Staff receive training reflecting the Christian education curriculum, including United

Church theology, practices, and beliefs and how these are lived out at camp.

7. The board ensures that staff have access to people and resources to assist them in providing a Christian community at camp.

8. Opportunities exist for campers to talk about their faith/spirituality and experiences.

How to Meet the Standards

1. Copy of the mission statement, link on website

2. Date of board minutes

3. Review of agenda

4. Review of brochures, website

5. Discussion about the program, observation of delivery of program

6. Review agenda

7. Chaplain on site, board member

8. Observation of programs

The purpose of the administrative standards and accreditation process is to address the church's vicarious liability issues. Vicarious liability means the organization is responsible for the actions of those who function on its behalf, i.e., staff and volunteers.

The Theological Values and Programming piece of the standards helps ensure that the United Church ethos is carried forward and an environment that encourages and supports Christian faith formation is created.

Accreditors will use the guiding principles as a means of measuring whether or not the faith formation/Christian education component is met. The accreditation process does not evaluate the content or quality of the programming. Content is the camp's role, with the oversight of the Regional Council. Rather, the accreditors will look for "markers" that identify the camp's program as a Christian education program.

Celebrating Our Beliefs and Diversity

“Over the years the United Church has become increasingly able to embrace diversity while still affirming a sense of distinctive significance that unites us as a faith community. While believing that its faith is grounded in truth, the church strives to understand that its truth need not deny the truths of others.”

—A Song of Faith
(Appendix C, page 14)

Some camps may be concerned that if they make their camp too much like a Christian church, it will affect their ability to attract ecumenical or interfaith campers, or campers from no faith background. It's up to each camp (as overseen by Regional Councils) to decide how they will meet these requirements:

- faith formation programming component
- opportunities for open conversation about beliefs
- training for staff in United Church theology, culture, and traditions

A Faith Formation Component, and Open Conversation about Beliefs

The guiding principles are not a big stick of rules and expectations, but guidelines for how you develop your faith formation programming. If you're worried that providing a faith formation component at your camp will cause you to lose campers, we would encourage you to focus on beginning an open conversation about what campers believe. What are their experiences, their stories? Look to the principles to help you begin the conversation. The principles offer a basic framework in which to create something that fits into your camp's structure and organization.

United Church Theology, Culture, and Traditions

The United Church of Canada has affirmed its faith in a variety of ways. The most recent statement of faith, A Song of Faith (2006), was not the first time the United Church formally expressed its collective faith. In the Basis of Union (1925), in the Statement of Faith (1940), and in A New Creed (1968), the United Church has stated its faith in words appropriate to its time ([What We Believe](#)). What follows is not an in-depth study of the church's faith and practice (theology), but rather a brief overview of the ethos, or distinguishing character and guiding beliefs, of the church.

- The church's understanding of *God* is summed up in the opening statement of A Song of Faith: "God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description. Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship."
- Our lives are inspired by the wonderful stories from the *scriptures*; these stories must be interpreted in ways that are relevant in the world we live in today.
- We are called to passionate action for *social justice*—to protect the vulnerable, pray for deliverance from evil, and work with God for the healing of the world. We are called to stand with the oppressed, offering resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize.
- In the United Church, we celebrate two *sacraments*: baptism and communion.
- We believe in *welcoming everyone*, regardless of age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or physical ability.
- *Children* are full and welcome participants at the heart of each congregation.
- We welcome all people to the full life of Christian community, including celebrating the *marriage* of couples who are same-sex, previously divorced, or of different religions.
- We believe the Spirit of God is at work in many *different faith communities*.
- *Caring for one another* was central to Jesus' teachings.

An Open and Diverse Faith

The United Church has a long tradition of spiritual freedom, with a wide theological spectrum and a diversity of interpretations and understandings. We celebrate our diversity of beliefs, and encourage one another to ask questions as part of deepening our faith.

The Guiding Principles for Faith Formation allow room for the openness and diversity that exist in the church and at camp. A framework that embraces personal meaning, creativity, mercy and justice, traditions/rituals, environment and care of creation, Sabbath, questioning, and leadership is a framework that is flexible and adaptable to all camps.

Camps, just like congregations, are encouraged to create faith formation programming that invites ongoing dialogue with other faiths and provides open conversation and co-operation with those of no faith background. Encourage your campers to find their own particular place in how they understand and live faith, and to embrace the differences that exist when expressions and emphases differ.

Session Plans for the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation

The Guiding Principles for Faith Formation at Camp have been developed

- to help Regional Councils and camps choose or develop curricula for faith formation/Christian education programs
- to help camps provide an environment in which God is experienced and faith is formed through learning and practice

These principles are meant to act as a guide for camps to use when developing a program and practices that help campers to grow in faith and become more aware of their spiritual nature. They provide a framework to carry out faith formation and spiritual development according to each camp's structure and organization. You are invited to consider your own ideas for programs, activities, and actions that explore each principle—what your camp is already doing, and what you would like to explore further.

Along with each guiding principle you will find a spiritual application for that principle, as well as scriptures and sample activities. Relevant quotes from *A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada* (2006) and from camp boards/staff are also included.

In this time, when many feel they are too busy to search for resources and lead a program or stay up to date, consider developing a camp board sub-committee to help with faith formation/Christian education programming (see page 28 for more information).



Morning chapel service at Gesstwood

1. Personal Meaning

Principle: *Provide campers with opportunities to gain personal meaning through discovering, naming, claiming, and celebrating their God-given gifts and talents.*

Spiritual application: God has called and equipped all of us with special gifts designed to engage us in ministry with others. At camp we have the privilege of helping children and youth to discover their individual gifts as they emerge. We can nurture these gifts and provide opportunities for their expression through age-appropriate activities.

Scripture: Matthew 25:14–30 (the story of the talents), 1 Peter 4:10 (using our gifts to help others)

"We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit. For the sake of the world, God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry."

—A Song of Faith

Sample Activities:

- Offer opportunities for campers to share their own life stories
- Allow campers to use their gifts and display their talents in camp activities

"Help children learn that everyone is different. Help them recognize the talents they have, and give them opportunities to use those gifts at camp."

2. Creativity

"Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator, who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related. All creation is good. We sing of the Creator, who made humans to live and move and have their being in God."

—A Song of Faith

Principle: *Promote creativity and a camper's sense of wonder, by allowing time and supplies for campers to create something new.*

Spiritual application: We are co-creators with God. Many campers do not consider themselves creative. We need to encourage their imaginations and help them to believe they can succeed at trying new things.

Scripture: Exodus 35:25–26, 30–34 (construction of the Tabernacle); Genesis 1:26–28 (we were created in the image of the creator)

Sample Activities:

- Drawing; song or poetry writing
- Storytelling and drama
- Movement and dance

"Encourage campers to be imaginative and creative. Provide an opportunity for campers to escape the everyday and explore the world in a new way."

"Use a basic craft idea but allow the camper to add or create in their own way. It is amazing to see how creative they can be!"

3. Mercy & Justice

Principle: *Provide campers with occasions to find meaning in the community as they engage in acts of mercy and justice.*

Spiritual application: There are many issues, whether local or global, that campers can be made more aware of, and there are many opportunities for campers to become involved in caring for others. These issues can be as simple as kindness at camp, turning cabin lights off behind you, finishing all the food on your plate, or being aware of bullying, to larger community and global concerns such as homelessness, climate change, peacemaking, Aboriginal land issues, food production and distribution, intercultural and multilingual issues, and human rights. Camp communities are safe and diverse places where we can encourage campers as they engage in acts of mercy and justice.

Scripture: Luke 10:29–37 (the good Samaritan); Matthew 25:34–45 (whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me); Micah 6:8 (do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God)

“We sing of God’s good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God...”

—A Song of Faith

Sample Activities:

- Encourage campers to journal their contributions to the community as well as the acts of kindness they have received, so that they become more aware of their own and others’ actions
- Offer opportunities for campers to learn about justice issues in the local community (e.g., offering land acknowledgements, learning about treaties and unceded territories, local food production)

“Opens their eyes to conditions in the wider world; helps them find ways where they can make a difference.”

“The word ‘mercy’ doesn’t work for me, but the word ‘compassion’ does. I’ve understood this as talking about and practising compassionate action.”

4. Traditions & Rituals

"To point to the presence of the holy in the world, the church receives, consecrates, and shares visible signs of the grace of God.... We celebrate two sacraments as gifts of Christ: baptism and holy communion. In these sacraments the ordinary things of life—water, bread, wine—point beyond themselves to God and God's love, teaching us to be alert to the sacred in the midst of life."

—A Song of Faith

Principle: *Develop traditions and rituals that enhance inclusion as they point toward something larger than individual concerns.*

Spiritual application: Point campers to that which is beyond their everyday, ordinary experience, through the rituals and traditions of the Christian faith, the rituals of campfires and flag-raising, and the traditions of those from other faiths and backgrounds. The United Church tradition of spiritual freedom is just one example of a tradition that camps can embrace by encouraging campers to acknowledge and respect the perspectives and experiences of others who believe differently. What other long-standing United Church traditions and rituals might be helpful for campers to embrace?

Scripture: Exodus 31:12–17 (the tradition/ritual of Sabbath); 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 (the tradition/ ritual of communion)

Sample Activities:

- Develop a creed, motto, or rule of life that campers can integrate into their lives beyond camp
- Ensure that new campers are welcomed into the community by introducing them to camp traditions
- Practise familiar and repeated activities that provide safety within the unknown
- Introduce campers to spiritual practices from other faiths and backgrounds (e.g., Indigenous spirituality)

"Camp enables us to discover and experience the spirit of God in a new way. Whether that is in the great outdoors, in a meaningful relationship, or in daily rituals, this experience can be profound and powerful."

"Embrace traditions while looking for new ways of expression."

5. Environment & Care of Creation

Principle: *Encourage wonder and deepen campers' awareness of the environment and respect for nature.*

Spiritual application: Our faith describes creation, in all its diversity, complexity, and interdependence, as a reflection of the divine Creator. It emphasizes the connection of all creatures, and identifies humans not as lords and masters of the earth, but as one strand in the web of life. It names the mending of creation as part of God's plan and the work of the church. Create a variety of opportunities for campers to intentionally reflect upon God's presence in creation and discover ways of working in partnership with God to reconcile and make new.

Scripture: Genesis 1 and 2 (creation story); Genesis 2:15 (we are called to be stewards, to care for the earth God created)

"In grateful response to God's abundant love, we bear in mind our integral connection to the earth and one another; we participate in God's work of healing and mending creation."

—A Song of Faith

Sample Activities:

- Provide opportunities to learn sacred stories about creation from a variety of faith traditions
- Stop, look, listen, and feel the beauty of creation
- Emphasize campers' responsibility to care for the environment
- Offer times of unstructured (free) play in the natural environment
- Offer opportunities for campers to learn about local issues (e.g., watershed)

"Plan activities and events through which campers can perceive the rest of the world as fellow sojourners of creation, beloved of God and a source of wonderment and delight to God."

"Encourage campers to explore the meaning of knowing there is a higher power to our creation and that we need to care for, and marvel at the wonders around us."

6. Sabbath

Principle: *Offer campers opportunities to experience Sabbath as they step away from the hectic, chaotic way of life that is part of today's society.*

Spiritual application: Create opportunities for campers to become aware of God's presence and grow in relationship with God. As a Sabbath rest from our busy lives—even from the noise and busyness of camp—a unique gift for campers could be a special time of silence. Some camps take time each night at closing campfire to stop all talking and to just sit and listen to the sounds around them that they can't hear in the city: frogs croaking, locusts and crickets chirping, birds calling to one another.

Scripture: Genesis 2:1–3 (on the seventh day of creation, God rested); Exodus 20:8–11 (the 10 Commandments call us to rest as God rested); Psalm 46:10 (“Be still and know that I am God”)

“Divine creation does not cease until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration with the common ground of all being. As children of the Timeless One, our time-bound lives will find completion in the all-embracing Creator.”

—A Song of Faith

Sample Activities:

- Practise silence, prayer, meditation, and reflection in order to become aware of God's presence and grow in relationship with God
- Build toward a “night of silence” that would take place perhaps on the next-to-last night (to prepare, invite each cabin or group to spend some time thinking up and creating an interactive prayer station that they can set up on the campgrounds)

“Give campers opportunities for quiet and reflection; help them listen for and see God in the world around them.”

“An activity as simple as lying on your back in a field gazing at the stars at night, or at the clouds during the day, can be a Sabbath experience.”

7. Questioning

Principle: *Invite questions from the everyday to the mysterious.*

Spiritual application: The ability to question and doubt is important for youth to develop as they grow. It is part of their journey of deepening their understanding of themselves, God, faith, and life. Camps provide safe, nurturing, and caring environments where campers are encouraged to ask questions about anything and everything. By training campers to question beliefs and authority, we want to encourage them to use critical thinking to recognize when a source may be inaccurate, misleading, or biased. If they don't learn how to do this, it will be difficult for them to become leaders in the church and society.

Scripture: Luke 9:18–20 (“Who do you say that I am?”);
Luke 2:46 (Jesus questions the rabbis in the temple)

*“God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete
knowledge, above
perfect description.
Yet, in love, the one
eternal God seeks
relationship.”*

—A Song of Faith

Sample Activities:

- Ensure that camp is a safe place to ask questions that there may be no other opportunity to ask
- Value all questions
- Without criticism, explore responses and possibilities within the community

“We don't always need to have the answers. Allow campers to ask questions without expecting answers and allow campers to answer each others' questions and enter into discussion.”

“We are more comfortable expressing our doubts, concerns, beliefs, and questions, in small groups.”

“No question is considered stupid.”

8. Leadership

Principle: *Develop leaders and enhance leadership qualities among staff and campers.*

"In the church, some are called to specific ministries of leadership...; some witness to the good news; some uphold the art of worship; some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering; some build up the community of wisdom; some stand with the oppressed and work for justice....The work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship of all believers."

—A Song of Faith

Spiritual application: Camp is a testing ground for leadership development. As counsellors-in-training (CIT) or leaders-in-training (LIT), and later as camp staff, the value of camp leadership training becomes apparent as young people learn about and use a set of transferable leadership and life skills that are valuable regardless of their chosen profession. The possibilities for engaging trained, skilled, and passionate youth and young adults are endless if we as camps continue our work to include and make room for them to lead.

Scripture: Romans 12:6–8 (there are many gifts, including the gift of leadership); Exodus 18:25–26 (Moses begins to share leadership with others); Hebrew 13:7 (remember your leaders and imitate their faith)

Sample Activities:

- Provide faith formation training for staff
- Notice, name, and nurture leadership qualities of all participants

"Help campers develop gifts of leadership by leading at campfire, singing, vespers, morning watch, games, etc."

Conclusion

Engaging children and youth in faith formation doesn't have to happen just during worship or Christian education time. How about focusing other camp activities on spiritual disciplines:

- a hike focused on the practice of pilgrimage
- a craft project centred on the theme of compassion
- a creative writing activity focused on Bible study
- a sports activity focused on co-operation and nurture
- a musical challenge focused on prayer
- a nature activity focused on silence

Such an approach will help youth see that we do not only engage our spirituality and connect with God when we are being "religious," but rather we can be aware of God all the time, in everything we do. If they can learn this at camp, maybe they will be more open to the possibility back home, experiencing God at work while they are taking a test at school, for example, as well as at church.



Developing Your Camp's Faith Formation Program

Identifying Your Camp's Needs

Preparation

Who is responsible for developing the faith formation (Christian education) program resources for your camp? Whether you are developing your own or purchasing a curriculum, you may wish to gather a cross-generational group that includes board members, camp staff, and campers to consider the hopes, dreams, and goals for faith formation and the underlying theological, biblical, and community expectations.

Check with congregations and others in your area that might have an expertise in curriculum/program evaluation or development and see if they will provide assistance or readers. Have "samplers" or copies available of curricula and resources that you have used in the past or that can provide you with activity ideas. Provide copies of The United Church of Canada's [Song of Faith, A New Creed](#), and the preceding Session Plans for the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation to assist the process.

If you want to purchase a curriculum, use the guiding principles and the questions below to help you evaluate the curriculum before you buy it. Regional Councils that provide a curriculum for their camps can use the guiding principles and the steps below as a foundation when creating the curriculum. You may also reach out to your regional staff or United Church camping networks for support and recommendations for curriculum.

A good program addresses the needs and circumstances of the campers and accommodates an array of learning styles and ability levels. Careful planning in the beginning of the process will save time, energy, and aggravation later.

Questions for the Group

Before you begin to consider specifics, brainstorm together as a group:

1. What are your goals for the faith formation of campers?

Refer to the Session Plans for the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation to get a sense of The United Church of Canada's hopes, beliefs, and goals regarding faith formation.

As you develop your camp's faith formation goals, keep your camp's mission statement and goals posted somewhere visible.

- What does your camp's mission statement say?
- What are your camp's overall goals?
- How do these hopes, dreams, and goals coincide with beliefs of The United Church of Canada? (See "Celebrating Our Beliefs and Diversity," page 10.)

- Together with staff and campers, make a list of your camp's hopes, dreams, and goals for faith formation.

2. Who are your campers?

Who are the learners in your camp community? Consider how the needs of the following might affect your program/resource selection:

- What settings do your campers come from (rural, urban, inner city, intercultural, multi-racial, Indigenous)?
- Who are the campers (annual attendees, newcomers, interfaith, those with a strong faith background and those with no faith background)?
- Is your camp characterized by particular age and stage needs?
- What are the faith, relationship, and special needs and interests of your camp?
- What broader community and global issues might affect campers?
- What needs and interests will take priority?

3. What faith formation practices will be used?

Think about how faith formation happens in your camp. How might your own faith formation practices affect the program you develop? What role might the following practices play?

- Spiritual disciplines: Bible study, labyrinth, meditation, prayer, silence
- Outdoor activities and free play
- Worship
- Music, media, arts, drama, rituals, symbols, technology
- Relationships
- Attention to the lived human story
- Social justice action
- Care for the earth and its creatures
- Other considerations

Writing and Preparing for Your Daily Session

Once you have completed the initial work, choose your subject matter and set goals for learners.

There are a few practical steps you'll need to take to prepare your day's session—each of them common to camp leaders or teachers of any sort. Doing this prep work ahead of time will make your daily sessions move smoothly and effectively. What follows is an explanation of each step, and a sample lesson plan.

1. Guiding Principle

Determine which of the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation you will try to uplift throughout the program.

2. Goals

Based on the principle you choose, ask yourself, "What do I want campers to learn?" "What do I want them to be able to do?" "What do I want campers to take home with them?" Once you've organized your goals, you can decide what experiences and methods will best achieve them.

- Do you want campers to develop a deeper relationship with God?
- Do you want campers to become especially aware of the Divine within them?
- Do you want campers to focus on a particular Bible story or theme?
- Do you want campers to understand how God is at work in their midst?
- Do you want to emphasize the connection between daily behaviour and Christian beliefs?
- What knowledge, concepts, or behaviours do you want campers to acquire?

3. Objectives

Develop objectives to support each goal. Objectives are small steps that will accomplish the overall goal. They focus on the learner/camper. Objectives will help to determine the media and materials that will facilitate learning.

- Create objectives that are specific, observable, and manageable
- Use verbs: action words that reflect what you will see campers doing

For example:

Goal: Campers will practise stewardship of God's creation

Objectives: During the faith formation program, campers will

- explore God's creation
- learn about the ecological crisis
- identify three things they can do to care for creation after they go home

4. Scripture/Story

Select a scripture story or a story from another faith or tradition (Muslim, Aboriginal, etc.) that helps you bring your theme to life for campers. Jesus taught in parables because we learn best when we identify with truths in a practical, experiential way. See the story you select as the starting place for your day's lesson plan, and one way to bring the theme to life. Ask leading questions that connect campers' personal lives to the theme of the story.

5. Activities and Experiences

Now the fun begins, as you determine the activities and experiences campers will engage in to meet the purpose, goals, and objectives you've developed. Consider when and how the resources will be used. Are they for a specific time of faith formation, morning watch, or cabin devotions? Will they be used in small or large groups? Write down your chosen activity step by step. Explain the activity and set guidelines/rules. Be prepared to tell campers how they will take part. Distribute items needed for the activity, and announce how much time they'll have to complete it.

As you're determining the activities, take into account the differing gifts and skills of both leaders and campers and the variety of ways in which people lead and learn.

Diversity of Learning Styles

To put it simply, our learning style (or learning preference) is the way we tend to learn best. It involves our preferred method of taking in, organizing, and making sense of information.

Learning styles say nothing about the ability or intelligence of an individual, but they can help us understand why some tasks seem easier than others. The three basic learning style preferences are

- auditory (learning by hearing)
- visual (learning by seeing)
- kinesthetic (learning by doing)

People learn most effectively when the strategies used are closely matched with their preferred learning style. Different situations and learning environments require different learning strategies, so it's best to have a large repertoire from which to draw.

For more information on multiple intelligences, see this [article](#) by Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences and education.

6. Connections

Consider how to help campers see that what they've just learned is connected to everything they do. Each of the Guiding Principles for Faith Formation at Camp is a value or spiritual truth that connects to everything we do—whether in relationship with family or friends, at school, church, or camp, inside a building, or outside in God's nature.

7. Closure

Help campers verbalize what they've learned by preparing a variety of questions that will help them to focus on the theme. Talk together about how they can put the lessons learned in this session into practice in other camp activities.

8. Title

Create a title that clearly identifies the focus or theme of your lesson.

Sample Program Outline

Title of Session	Open Your Eyes: I'm Here!
Guiding Principle	Guiding Principle 5—Environment & Care of Creation: Encourage wonder and deepen campers' awareness of the environment and respect for nature. Create a variety of opportunities for campers to intentionally reflect upon God's presence in creation and discover ways of working in partnership with God to reconcile and make new.
Goal	To strengthen campers' relationship with the Divine.
Objective	Campers will explore the story of creation and be invited into relationship with creation, with each other, and with God.
Scripture	Genesis 1 and 2 (creation story)
Story	An Indigenous creation story from your region. You may wish to invite an Indigenous Elder from a community near you to share a story with campers. (Learn more about the use of Creation stories and other oral traditions.)

Materials	<p>Prepare beforehand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of items for campers to find during a nature hunt (make copies of the handout for every second camper) • Bags for campers to put items into, and pencils for them to check off items they find • A whistle
Introduction	<p>Using the two creation stories, Christian and Indigenous, help campers experience the story of creation. Ask campers to imagine the earth before light, land, plants, animals, etc. How often do they take the time to notice nature on their way to school, or in their own neighbourhoods or backyards?</p>
Activity	<p>Stop, Look, Listen, and Feel the Beauty of Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to campers that they are going on a nature hunt. • Share rules for the hunt (e.g., go in pairs; stay in sight of a counsellor). • Describe where they're going and distribute a map. • Hand out a list of items campers are to find. • Announce what time you expect them to be back. • Line up and begin the hunt. • Blow a whistle to end the hunt and bring campers back. • Invite campers to share what they found, and where. • As they share each item, have them place it on a table.
Closure	<p>Help campers to verbalize what they've learned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did they see things that they had never noticed before? • Were there things they liked or disliked? • Were there animals or plants that they wanted to see but didn't? • Did they find anything interesting that wasn't on their list?
Connections	<p>What connections can campers make in this lesson with other camp activities? e.g., How can we care for creation when swimming? canoeing? eating? sleeping?</p>

Supplementary Reading

Building and Strengthening Faith Formation at Camp

Every summer camp boards and directors face the challenge of finding appropriate material for their faith formation/Christian education programming. They are also challenged to find appropriate leaders.

These are ongoing challenges for congregational Sunday schools as well, but the camp situation is unique. In a Sunday school program, the leader is usually an adult. Leaders may or may not have a Christian Education Committee to support them in their work, but in the minister of the congregation, they at least have a spiritual director available to them. They may also have access to a variety of curricula and program resources.

Camps' faith formation programming is often led by a young person, sometimes as young as 16. Leaders may have no curriculum to follow and be instructed to develop a program on their own—a daunting prospect for even a well-trained and experienced adult leader!

Camps face this ongoing challenge of providing practical resources for young and inexperienced faith formation program leaders who may or may not be a member of the United Church. The need for staff training in this area is crucial, as is the need for concrete support from the camp board.

Tips on Strengthening Faith Formation Programming

Regional Councils

- Regional Councils play a crucial role in supporting faith formation programming at camps. Some regions hold annual camp gatherings, which provide support for program work and training for staff.

Local Communities of Faith

- Talk to United Church ministers in nearby communities of faith to see if they can help the camp's faith formation programming with people and/or resources.
- Connect with local children/youth ministry leaders and programs. You could unearth a host of valuable resources for your camp.
- Talk to nearby communities of faith, and let them know the challenges you face at camp every year in the area of faith formation programming. They may be willing to help, recommend someone to lead the program, or offer some new ideas on how you can strengthen your program.

Camp Boards

Camp boards are strongly encouraged to form a sub-committee to help guide and/or develop faith formation programming.

- Outline the qualities and training required for the person in the leadership position.
- Become familiar with these Guiding Principles for Faith Formation at Camp.
- Use “Developing Your Camp’s Faith Formation Program” (page 22) to create a program that incorporates the guiding principles. Use the guiding principles to create a standard template for faith formation programming at your camp (see page 26 for a sample).
- Use the guiding principles to discuss how camp programming can uplift these same values by integrating faith language into all activities.
- Don’t rely on the camp chaplain (if you have one) to be the only staff who integrates faith into camp programs.
- Remember that separating camp activities into “religious” Bible study and worship segments contributes to campers thinking that God is not interested in those aspects of their life that involve hanging out with peers for fun or living into one’s innate potential. (See “Incorporating Spiritual Language and Reflections into Camp Activities,” page 33).



Campers at Pearce Williams

Faith Formation and Spiritual Development

by Amy Crawford

Being spiritual is woven into our human nature. As humans we have the ability to experience transcendence—the mystery of something beyond ourselves, something holy. Spirituality is part of each and every person whether we choose to nurture it or even acknowledge it. Spirituality stretches beyond the boundaries of religion, culture, history, and social context. Spirituality can be more fully developed through practices and disciplines that open us to the transcendent other.

Faith suggests an intentional acknowledgement and belief in something. A lived faith requires that we put our beliefs into action. Faith formation aims to help people understand and practise a way of living based on scripture and tradition, as well as personal experiences and critical thinking. Faith forming practices and activities create opportunities for people to come close to God and encounter God's love, grace, challenge, and mystery. As individuals and as communities, we change, we are renewed, and we share in renewing God's creation every day. This spiritual growth is a lifelong process, and spiritual disciplines are the means by which we continue that process. Faith formation is not a fixed outcome that we achieve, once and for all. As long as we are alive, the cumulative happenings at home, work, church, school, and play shape us. Through practices and experiences we are formed in faith and grow in spirit. Faith formation aims to create communion and intimacy, leading to living in new ways.

The 39th General Council 2006 adopted A Song of Faith, a statement revealing the foundations of faith as lived out in The United Church of Canada. The statement includes the following:

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery, of living things, diverse and interdependent, of complex patterns of growth and evolution, of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls, we sing of God the Creator, the Maker and Source of all that is....

We sing of God's good news lived out, a church with purpose: faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all, resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence, human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God, corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ, creation's mending. We sing of God's mission.

The 38th General Council 2003 adopted the following guiding principles for Christian education/faith formation in The United Church of Canada:

- (a) dynamic life-long learning;
- (b) growth in a transforming relationship with God;
- (c) active engagement with the Christian story, past and present, and the formation of new stories of "God with us";

- (d) intentional reflection upon God's presence in creation, and working in partnership with God to reconcile and make new;
 - (e) discovery and celebration of gifts;
 - (f) equipping persons for tasks that are holistic and justice-seeking;
 - (g) formation of community relationships that are mutual, holistic, justice-seeking, and cross-generational;
 - (h) engagement in endeavours that are mutual, holistic, and justice-seeking; and
 - (i) an invitation for persons of all ages and stages to explore and grow in their relationship with God as revealed through Jesus Christ, with the community of faith, and with the world.
- (*The Manual*, 2010, section 242)

In recent decades, the terms “spirituality” and “religion” have begun to hold very different meanings. This may be the result of growing secularism in society and distrust of religious institutions. Often religion is viewed as being linked to formal institutions, and spirituality is seen as independent of an institution and often individualized. However, from a theological perspective, this division is both artificial and unhelpful. Spirituality contains elements of community and can arise from an experience with a group. Similarly, religion can elicit feelings, thoughts, and behaviours that convey comfort and security through ritual.

Research shows that a whole range of factors are involved in the development of faith. Both cognitive and affective factors are involved. Leaders must be equipped to engage both the rational and emotional sides of participants when offering opportunities for faith formation.

Recently, Dr. Mark Holder (Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan) tested the relationship between children's happiness and their spirituality. Holder has been studying children's happiness and knew that there was a slight relationship between adult spirituality and adults' sense of happiness. He wanted to examine whether this was true of children as well. The results were surprising to the research team: a significant percentage of children's happiness can be accounted for by spirituality. The conclusion being tested is that the more we can assist children in developing their spirituality, the happier they will become.

When Dr. Holder speaks about happiness, he is talking about more than just a momentary feeling that may be part of any given day. He's talking about a personal trait that affects one over the long term. It's also important to note that “spirituality” is not the same as “religiosity,” according to the study. Spirituality is multi-dimensional, and each of these dimensions correlates positively with happiness.

The dimensions of spirituality studied included

- sense of personal meaning
- sense of communal meaning (finding significance in relationship with other people)
- awareness of the environment and a sense of awe, appreciation, and respect for nature
- transcendental awareness, or a belief in a higher power or a being greater than oneself

Alone, neither the brief and often sporadic engagement with a congregation or the intense but more isolated experiences of camp will be enough to develop spiritually mature and faithful individuals. Congregations and camps, working in partnership with each other as well as with families, will strengthen and enhance the possibility for the health and wholeness of all with whom we minister.

Incorporating Spiritual Language and Reflections into Camp Activities

Excerpt from Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program: Final Report Grant #1999 2178-000

The purpose of challenge courses and their usefulness for spiritual formation

Most camps described their climbing towers, zip lines, high and low ropes-courses, etc. as means for building trust, self-confidence, and a sense of community. Camp F listed “team spirit”, “unity”, “trust” and “confidence”¹ as the hoped-for outcomes when integrating challenge elements into its program. Camp N reported that its climbing wall “has become the favorite recreational activity for many of the campers. It is a unique means of developing self-esteem and group cohesiveness...” Camp P, which includes dramatic performances in most of its programs, observed that “participants are learning and practicing new skills and growing in their sense of self-esteem and self-worth. They are receiving affirmation from important adults in their lives; they are feeling good about themselves and that is good.” Camp B contended that its ropes course innovations related to developing “communication and trust” and to promoting teambuilding.

Only one camp explicitly discussed theological/spiritual themes it hoped to promote with the use of challenge course elements. In fact, Camp Q captured the promotional and educational tensions presented by these elements when observing, “The initiatives on the low ropes course tend to lend themselves better to group dynamics than the high ropes course that tends to emphasize individual growth. We have learned that it is the high ropes activities that get the students’ attention, but it is the low ropes activities that teach.” Camp Q uses ropes courses to focus on cultivating social and psychological well-being skills, but takes the lessons beyond basic good citizenship and personal care to reinforce the denomination’s camp theme, “together we can accomplish more.” Camp Q also sees the low ropes course as an opportunity “to introduce a study on the function of the church” and its life together as the body of Christ. Furthermore,

The fact that a student can walk across a log suspended thirty feet in the air does not mean he will make a good pastor some day. The way the student reacts will be reflective of how stress is handled in other areas of life. Also, the student will be able to begin forming new patterns of behavior that are more consistent with Christian behavior and thinking.

Camp Q helps its campers see the connections between the feelings they experience on a challenge course, the responses they make to those challenges and the Christian beliefs and practices that should animate their lives.

¹ All quotations taken from ICMEP grantees’ final program reports unless otherwise noted.

Why associate theological and spiritual language with climbing walls, low ropes courses, and other recreational elements of camp life?

The answer lies in Christian Smith's research on the spiritual lives of American youth. Smith, in his 2005 book, *Soul Searching*, describes a religious perspective among contemporary teens that he names "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" because of its emphasis on God acting as butler and divine therapist to human beings who otherwise have little need of a transcendent and immanent divine power. He identifies five basic characteristics of this viewpoint:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.²

It is the second and third characteristics, with their problematic reduction of Christian theology to simple maxims for civil behavior and personal well-being, that receive reinforcement when camps fail to attach richer and fuller theological language and critical reflection to their programmatic activities. In addition, the separation of camp activities into "religious" Bible study and worship segments and recreational or group-building periods contributes to the fourth characteristic, in which God is perceived as uninterested in those aspects of a teen's life that involve hanging out with peers for fun or living into one's innate potential. *Camps must explicitly incorporate religious language and theological reflection in all camp activities if young people are to expand their Christian perspective beyond Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.*

This becomes even more critical when camp counsellors, excited about challenge course activities and the group building they promote, decide to incorporate these same activities into congregational youth ministries (as Camp F reports is occurring when summer staff return to the youth groups they lead back home). Otherwise, both camps and congregational youth ministries hinder young people in their search for a truly powerful, life-changing God who challenges them to embrace a lifetime of discipleship and service for the coming of God's realm. Camp I's decision to invest energy in developing a "Christian formation framework" that "provides the rationale behind the disciplines of camp life from orientation and icebreakers, through regular routines of service, worship, prayer and play" works to reclaim the possibility that God's power and presence can be known and relied on in all things, not just in particularly "religious" moments or times of need. As Camp I noted, this approach does not overcome the "challenges of keeping the community whole and healthy" in competition "with challenges of keeping the community focused outwardly on mission rather than inward on itself." *The self-centered aspect of American adolescent spirituality, represented in Smith's third characteristic, must be regularly challenged by camp and congregational leaders if it is to be reworked as a concern for faithfulness and bringing into being a new heaven and new earth.*

² Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

Camp C reminded us that *Christian camp is fundamentally a place where children and teenagers can experience a "Sabbath" from the demanding schedules and social expectations of their daily lives.* Reflecting on the lives of the campers, Camp C realized, "Students these days are so busy with school, sports, jobs, chores, etc. that they rarely take time just to be. So, we give them time. We give them space in which they can listen for God. Time in which they can rest with their thoughts. Time to sit at the feet of Jesus." Fifteen or even thirty minutes of "Quiet Time" in the morning and (for younger campers) an hour of "Flat On Bunk" time in the afternoon are not sufficient to create a sense of Sabbath, especially if the rest of a camper's time is spent moving from one activity to another in a packed daily schedule. Beautiful natural settings have frequently been places where the people of God discover the spiritual benefits of silence, solitude, contemplation and rest. Contemporary children and youth are growing up without meaningful experiences of these basic building blocks of Christian faith and psychological health. Camps are uniquely well situated to restore these lost spiritual practices to young people.

Reprinted with permission, from "Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program: Final Report Grant #1999 2178-000" by Dr. Karen-Marie Yust (December 2005; Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education). Read the full report online at <http://acacamps.com/rac/ICMEPreport.pdf>.



Campers at Pearce Williams

Singing a Song of Faith at Camp

[Adapted for camps from A Song of Faith. Read the full text on the United Church website.](#)

In love, the one eternal God seeks relationship.
Engaged with God in the mission to bless creation,
camps were created as places
for relationship and community.

Together with God camps seek to guide all things
toward harmony with their Source.
Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,
camps sing of God the Creator,
the Maker and Source of all that is.

Camps direct lives toward right relationship
with each other, creation, and with God.
Campers discover their place
as one strand in the web of life.
They grow in wisdom and compassion,
learning to recognize all people as kin.

Camps provide moments of unexpected
inspiration and courage lived out.
Campers experience beauty, truth, and goodness,
blessings of seeds and harvest,
friendship and family, body, mind and spirit,
the reconciliation of persons through community
and the articulation of faith.

Camps offer worship through word, music,
play, creation, art, and sacrament,
seeking to continue the story of Jesus
by embodying Christ's presence in the world.

At camps we have not always lived up to our vision.
We require the Spirit to reorient us,
helping us to live an emerging faith,
challenging us to live by grace
rather than entitlement.

Camps sing of God's good news lived out,
staff and campers with purpose:
becoming aware of God's presence,
encouraging wonder of creation
and respect for nature,

valuing all questions, discovering meaning,
faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,
members of a community held and inspired by God,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.
Camps sing of God's mission.

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
At camp, some are called
to specific ministries of leadership,
both paid and volunteered, young and old.

Some witness to the good news,
and uphold the art of worship.
Some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering.
Some build up the community of wisdom.
Some stand with the lonely, working to build
relationships and community.

To embody God's love in the world,
the work of camps requires the ministry
and discipleship of all believers.

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,
camps welcome all in the name of Christ.
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,
staff and campers gather
as Christ's guests and friends.

We taste the mystery of God's great love for us,
and are renewed in faith and hope.
Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.

Creating and seeking relationship,
in awe and trust,
camps witness to Holy Mystery
who is Wholly Love.

Amen.

Faith Formation at Camp helps camps provide an environment in which God is experienced and faith is formed through learning and practice.

Engaged with God in the mission to bless creation, camps were created as places for relationship and community. Together with God we seek to guide all things toward harmony with their Source. Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery, camps sing of God the Creator, the Maker and Source of all that is. Camps direct lives toward right relationship with each other, creation, and with God.

—From “Singing a Song of Faith at Camp”

download from
[Handbooks and Guidelines on the United Church website](#)