

NATIONAL CAMPING SUNDAY

The United Church of Canada

April 28, 2002

Each year, one Sunday in spring is designated National Camping Sunday. The worship service and activities on this Sunday are designed to:

- Increase visibility of the church's ministry of residential camping
- Give visibility to local United Church camp(s)
- Help people recall their memories and experiences of church camping.

Did you know?

- There are approximately 100 United Church and affiliated camps.
- Collectively these camps have upwards of 50,000 people (children, youth and adults).
- Camps are supported by hundreds of volunteers across the country who serve as camp board members, volunteer staff, chaplains, nurses, and many other roles.
- Church camping is a ministry of evangelism and outreach to children, youth and adults.

WORSHIP IDEAS

Below are some resources for those giving leadership on camping Sunday, April 28, 2002 (or another date of your choosing.) Plans for worship and congregational time may involve:

- organizing a display which includes photos, brochures and crafts from your local church camp;
- a large poster advertising the dates of summer camp programs. If your camp has a promotional slide show, have it available for use during or after the service;
- ordering United Church Camping bulletins and brochures from the United Church Bookroom;
- inviting camp committee people to talk about their summer camp program;
- making a banner with the United Church Camp logo;
- asking the church choir to prepare a camp song for the anthem.

The following article is provide to bring further insight about worship at Camp and relating this experience to the congregation.

WORSHIP AT CAMP

What is unique and powerful about Worship at Camp? When I think about worship at camp, the main word that comes to mind is freedom. The first freedom is the freedom to "come as you are." Campers come from all different places,

bringing with them a rainbow of experiences. Worship at camp tries to take into account the wide variety of people who are both worshipping and creating a space for inclusion.

The second freedom is the freedom to express and worship in different ways: to be quiet or loud, to involve the group in movement and song, to laugh together, and to have fun. There is flexibility in where elements of worship are placed during the time, in how the biblical story is shared, and in how the community comes together in prayer. Experiencing different forms of worship expression allows campers room for growth and learning, and creates a place for campers to feel the presence of God in many different ways.

At camp there is a uniqueness in worship in that a freedom exists around time and space. It is a precious gift to worship whenever and wherever—morning, noon, or evening, from the pool to vesper point. Worship can happen wherever and whenever the space is created.

A powerful element of worship at camp is that most of the time the leadership is youth, who are being given the chance to share their faith and grow in the skills of sharing and leading others in worship. There are few places outside of camp where this happens on a regular basis.

Worship at camp is unique in that it is not difficult to put people in touch with the AWESOMENess of Creation. They are bathed in it from the moment they step on site. The freedom of being "away from it all" and being part of God's natural environment is in itself enough to let the Spirit move.

WHY IS WORSHIP AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE AT CAMP?

Worship at camp is a coming together of the group on a regular basis to learn and grow. An instant community is built where campers can participate as much or as little as they want. There is no skill level necessary, there are no badges or competitions to win, and the focus is on creating space for campers to feel special and welcome. Worship is also a place where we pass on some of our biblical story, looking at stories of the past and relating them to the present. It is important for campers to feel God's love and presence in community.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LIFE AT CAMP AND WORSHIP AT CAMP

By living in community, seeds of faith are sown throughout the length of the camp session. In the United Church we believe that this process, known as faith formation, is holistic—taking into account the whole person. Campers experience the mystery and wonder of the created world during all parts of camp life. Worship is a spiritual discipline that goes hand-in-hand with full participation in camp life. Worship brings together the thinking, feeling, imaginative, and creative parts of all camp activities to celebrate God's presence. Campers often get a chance to put into practice some of the things they learned during worship time. Worship tries to tie in teachable moments from the week with biblical story, much

like a sermon might include relevant illustrations from the world today. At camp, we dialogue, question, and live the story in community.

WHAT CAN CONGREGATIONS LEARN FROM WORSHIP AT CAMP?

Congregations can learn the gift of freedom— when we relax, even in how we dress. They will realize that holy ground is everywhere and may even be inspired to take off their shoes. The following are a few examples of how to bring some camp worship ideas into the church...

- clap, snap, stomp, echo, cheer
- pass the peace in creative ways, charge it up
- be willing to change the flow of the experience, spontaneously or planned
- parade, move, dance, use group movement
- hold hands, light a candle
- wish or dream aloud
- experiment with drama and the arts
- pass a symbol amongst the congregation, hands-on learning
- planned spontaneity, use your young people in worship
- be willing to risk it and share faith in an open setting
- find ways to bring that connection with nature into the sanctuary
- use a variety of instruments in worship
- be silent, recognizing that some people have a short attention span.

The most important thing that congregations can learn from worship at camp is that young people are an important part of our community and we need to allow a place for them to express and grow with our church family. We need to make sure that they know they have the freedom to be who they are and to worship in community.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP AT CAMP?

There is freedom in the different elements that we use in worship at camp:

1. **MUSIC:** Camp singing is an activity that the whole group shares, and effective music leadership unites a group through song. Freedom exists to use the instruments people have brought, to use movement and drumming to make music, or to simply sing.
2. **STORY:** A big part of Christian education is the passing on of our biblical story. Don't pass up the opportunity to share and work with these stories. There are many other excellent stories, but there are no longer many places where young people can hear the biblical story. Feel free to experiment with how you do this—read a paraphrase, use drama, use cartooning, have music in the background, use sign language while reading the story, sing, chant, rap, tell with sound effects, include verbal and physical responses, read and then have listeners tell back portions of the story, dialogue, pantomime, etc.
3. **SCRIPTURE:** The word of God is living and active (Heb. 4:12). Don't underestimate the value of scripture. Passages can be linked to skits and songs.

Particularly with young children, break the story down to the essentials. Too much detail can be distracting. Accentuate important parts of the scripture passage using an altered tone of voice, hand gestures, facial expressions, and surprises. Speak at a slow, but comfortable pace. It's cool to read fast to prove your reading ability, but doesn't allow for comprehension. Give the youth time to process what you are saying. Demonstrate the passion in the passage (or the emotion, or the defeat or victory). Don't just read the passage— bring it to life! In the short time that you have with your campers, it is possible to send them home knowing a few passages.

4. PRAYER: Prayer is a great chance to communicate with God. Furthermore, you have the privilege and responsibility of teaching these young people how to pray to God. There is more than one formula for prayer. Here are some examples:

- Popcorn Prayer—in no particular order, each person prays out loud if and when they feel comfortable.
- Silent Prayer—each person is invited to pray silently.
- Squeeze Prayer—taking turns around a circle, each person is invited to pray aloud or silently, then squeeze the hand of the person next to them.
- Repeat-After-Me Prayer—the leader prays a line and the participants repeat it.
- Choral Prayer (Lord's Prayer)—everyone prays the same prayer aloud simultaneously.
- Responsive Prayer ("Lord, hear our prayer")—the leader prays a few lines and campers join with a suitable response.

Prayer is from the heart. It's between you and God, and can be shared with a group.

NATIONAL CAMPING SUNDAY SERVICE, APRIL 28, 2002

THEME: "Camp - We are not alone, we live in God's world"

Invite people to come to worship in comfortable camp clothes – today is a day to celebrate the presence of God in our world, come as you are. There is no specific children's time because this is an intergenerational worship service.

A TIME FOR GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

One person, preferably a child or youth, reads the call to worship on line at a time, while other members of the congregation bring up the symbols and place them on the communion table. Place a brightly covered cloth/piece of material over the table.

A Space to Learn and Grow

bring up a plant

A Space to try new things

bring up an archer's bow or a paddle

A Space to Connect with God

light a candle

A Space to pass on our story

bring up a Bible

A Space to feel part of nature

bring up a campfire log

A Space to forgive and forget

bring up a stick with a piece of white material tied to it as a peace flag

A Space to be still and listen

play CD/tape of wordless nature sounds

A Space to just beÖ welcome to worship

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Keep the nature music CD/tape playing during prayer.

Awesome God, we come remembering camp and the experiences and memories we have shared while at ADD CAMP NAME. We remember hearing birds chirping in the morning; we remember feeling God at ADD CAMP NAME. We are aware that "we are not alone" and that "we live in God's world." We find ourselves part of something that is very different from the crazy world we live in. We discover a place where it seems easier to say, "We believe in God."

HYMN

We suggest using instruments common to many United Church Camps across Canada for all of the hymns during this service. These may include but are not limited to a piano and a guitar.

This is the Day - VU # 412, SFGP# 40
All things Bright and Beautiful - Red Book #86

A TIME FOR LISTENING

SCRIPTURE

Have two flipcharts at the front of the worship space. Have two people assigned to paint pictures of what they hear during the reading, one to paint a scene of land, the other a scene of water – however the spirit moves them. Place plastic under the flipcharts, have one brush per colour so you don't have any rinsing.

Psalm Scripture – Psalm 148 in the NRSV

FOR THE NEXT SECTION you are invited to choose one of three options:

- 1) Story Sharing
- 2) Sermon
- 3) Campfire/Drama

OPTION #1: STORY SHARING

Please feel free to pick and choose as you wish. An option with this section is to sing a verse of a song after each sharing, such as " We Praise you for the Sun" VU#225, Red book #204, or "It Only Takes a Spark" VU # 289.

LEADER: In Canada, the United Church owns over 90 residential camping sites ranging in size from 18 to 600 acres. Each of these special places is very different – donated farmland, swampy areas, beaches (rocky and sandy), some with electricity and some not. Lakes, rivers, bogs, forests, mountains and oceans bound these spaces, but the common thread in each of these spaces is that they allow people of all ages, particularly children, to be aware of God in an experiential way.

Ask an elder, a child, a youth, or a young adult from the worshipping community to share a story about feeling close to God in nature, preferably about camp – specifically about your closest United Church Camp.

SING

LEADER: A special part of camping is that a space is created for passing on our story of how God "has come in Jesus". At camp there is a freedom to hear the stories in different ways, as well as being able to live the story by following Christ's example of accepting and loving others.

Ask someone to share a story about a relationship built at camp. At camp we realize that Jesus came to "reconcile and make new", treating campers equally and allowing them to grow and experience things they might never have before.

SING

LEADER: The Word is made flesh through counselors who bring biblical stories to life. We recognize that often we may be the only Bible that some campers ever read or see.

Ask someone to come up and share a story about something they learned at camp.

SING

LEADER: The Beginning of camp is the first page in a new chapter of a camper's life, a clean slate. It is important while living in community that we leave space for teachable moments, looking to see God working "in us

and others by the Spirit." Teaching respect for others is an important place to start when creating sacred spaces.

Ask someone to come up and share a story about an opportunity they had to teach someone something at camp.

OPTION #2: SERMON

This option is not meant to be intergenerational – please use this only if children and youth are leaving to go to other programming. Read the bold worship leader's parts from Story Sharing (above) and then continue with this:

Camps are also sacred spaces because trust is built there. People find camp to be an open place, a place to listen to the opinions of others as well as to share. Through living together and learning to trust, leaders are grown. Campers begin to appreciate what it means to "trust in God" – by experiencing that through trusting relationships with counselors and other campers.

Camps often begin by creating sacred space through a covenant between those living in the community, whether it is a one-week or month-long session. The covenant is a promise made between those living in community to treat each other in acceptable ways. The difference in Christian community is that we speak the truth in love and do not attempt to create a Utopia: we realize that disagreements occur and sometimes compromises can be made and sometimes not. We attempt to allow campers to live in community with one another, knowing that we are only human and people will make mistakes. We have the covenant to refer back to when dealing with difficult situations.

"We are called to be the church" inside our buildings and out of them. It is so important for sacred spaces to be kept and made available for use by all. People can sense God in many green spaces, but our United Church camps have history and tradition as spaces where people have been able to "Celebrate God's presence, and to live with respect in creation". These are spaces of teaching where people learn to care for the environment. Many of our camping programmes allow for the integration of children with special needs into their residential camp setting, often providing one-on-one care for campers in a cabin group. What a sight to see children and staff learning "to love and serve others", no matter what their needs are. It is an amazing task to think of youth being in ministry – from passing on teachings from our past and wiping away homesick tears to washing soiled sleeping bags, they model Christ washing the feet of the disciples.

Many United Church camps model and teach about social justice. In a safe environment, campers can learn to explore what it means "to seek justice and resist evil". How do we put our faith into practice? How do we walk the walk, not just talk the talk? Campers are allowed to think critically about things that are happening in their lives and in the lives of our neighbours – near and far. It is important for them to realize that we have many similarities with people who live

in other parts of God's world. Sacred spaces at some camps are ecumenical with teachings around respect for other perspectives. It is important to discuss with campers about the campers who came before us. Many camping programmes incorporate history and exploration of Aboriginal issues and practices.

People come to camp bringing various experiences with them and it is important as camp leaders to be sensitive to this. Some children may be quite comfortable with "proclaiming Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope," and others may be hearing the story for the first time. Different parts of Christ's story are lived at different times during camp depending on the age of campers. Many of our sites have symbols of this hope placed throughout the camp, identifying us as United Church camps. Within camp itself, there are often special places where Chapel, Morning Watch, and/or Vespers happen. These spaces within camp itself are often dear to people, whether they have been part of a big group of people celebrating God, or have walked there for a quiet moment to reflect and think. In these places and at such times, prayer often happens.

Campers often come to camp needing a safe place to be. At camp, we try not to block the world out, but to use our time away to think over and learn from our world. At camp the cycles of life in nature often match the cycles of life at home. Baby frogs and salamanders are hunted for, played with, and enjoyed during a nature session – a perfect opportunity to talk about the life span. "In life, in death, in life beyond death," Sometimes children understand this and talk about it more freely than adults. It is important for us as camp leaders to listen to children and create space for them to have their voices heard. Some of the most profound theological learnings have happened when children remind us that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. These are the moments to be thankful for. We may not have all the answers, but we are aware of the presence of the Holy.

At camp, Sacred Space allows for the planting of seeds of faith. We start with the basics – "God is with us" and God loves us just the way that we are. There are people who may have never heard that message: "You are special". If campers leave having found a space where they realized that "We are not alone" who knows what the Spirit will do? The variety of camp-sites, programmes, and leadership is well representative of this United Church of ours. An open table is an open space where we respect others' views and allow for diversity within our thoughts and our ideas. This is to be celebrated and valued.

Consider ending with a minute for mission about your local camping ministry.

OPTION #3: CAMPFIRE/DRAMA

This is an interactive section, great for intergenerational worship.

CHOICE A: - gather some people with camping background to teach some songs that they remember from their camping days – leading the group from fast songs

to slower songs.

OR

CHOICE B: Divide the congregation into four or five groups, (works well in smaller congregations) and have designated facilitators with each group (fantastic if they have a bit of camping background). Give the groups time to introduce themselves and share a camping story, then decide what song, skit, story, or memory it is that they would like to share with the church. If there is a lack of camping background, people can always talk about Sunday school and Sunday school picnic activities. An additional idea: Hand out symbols of camp for discussion such as campfire log, water, rocks, soil, a plant, lifejacket, paddle and any other symbols that may come to mind.

IDEA: End the campfire with a snack in the service. Kool-aid and rice crispie squares (no crumbs if they are fresh) are a good snack option. Find three people to hand snacks out, have two people designated to pick up the cups and then have the worship leader direct the group back to their seats.

LITANY

Find people of all ages in your congregation to read each of these nine experiences of camp – not coming to the front – just standing and reading from where they are sitting in the church.

**To feel dew-covered blades of grass in the morning;
To push your toes through worm-filled mud on an outdoor adventure;
To lie on your tummy and watch a toad find its way home during free time;
To hunt for salamanders with your counselor during a discovery hike;
To learn about many different types of plants and animals in nature;
To stand outside and feel the rain on your face during an all camp game;
To scratch those mosquito bites you received during a night hike;
To lay on your back and watch the stars in their splendor on a sleep-out;
To experience a God "Who is creating and has created"**

A TIME FOR RESPONDING

HYMN

It only takes a Spark – VU#289
Praise to God for Things We See - Red Book # 200

OFFERING

Use colourful children's sand pails to collect the offering today, or bread baskets will work, as well. Consider donating a portion of the offering to your local camping ministry.

OFFERTORY *God of the Sparrow* – VU # 229 (verses 1-3) or your usual

offertory song.

A TIME FOR GOING FORTH

CLOSING SONG/PRAYER

"Like a Rock" by Linnea Good and Keri Wehlander. Permission is given to photocopy and use this song on National Camping Sunday April 28, 2002. Please see the credits for purchasing information.

The following are the actions for the song:

"Like a rock" – hands out – palms down

"Like the starry night sky" – reach up to the sky

"Like the sun on the horizon" – one arm straight out – palm up – other arm comes in hand open facing forward (as if you were telling someone to stop) as the sun on the horizon

"Like the river runs to ocean" – keep arm out like horizon and weave the other hand as if it was a river running to the ocean

"Our home is in God" – cross arms like a hug

BENEDICTION

Go now as people of faith, remembering what camp has taught us, and looking for the chance to connect with God, to connect with friends, to connect with leaders and mentors, and to connect with self. Thanks be to God.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Clip art from the web-site (<http://www.uccancamping.org>) for use in bulletins.
- The United Church Camping logo.
- Contact your local camp for pictures/displays/speakers.
- *Gathered Round* by Kim McKellar from United Church Publishing House.
- "Spontaneous Melodramas" by Youth Specialties – This gives you quick, easy, Bible story reenactments that the entire congregation can be part of.

CREDITS

The 2002 Camping Sunday Service was compiled by Maya Landell. Maya currently works as the year-round director at Pearce-Williams Christian Centre, an outreach ministry of Elgin Presbytery, London Conference. She can be contacted at pearce.williams@sympatico.ca

Like a Rock - © 2000 Borealis Music, www.LinneaGood.com Permission is given to photocopy and use this song in worship dedicated to the camping theme. For further use and purchase (such as using it at camp) please contact us below and make arrangements.

Linnea Good & Borealis Music

14409 Cartwright Ave RR#3, Site 38,Comp 23 Summerland, BC V0H 1Z0

Online Store: <http://www.LinneaGood.com>

Voice: 250-494-5111 Fax: 250-494-5139

The welcoming prayer for this service was written by Micheal Shewburg who is currently the Youth Program Coordinator in Kent Presbytery, London Conference. He can be contacted at kenesserie@southkent.net

Parts of this service are from articles written by Maya Landell:

- "Worship for Camp", Seeds & Sowers YOUTH, the United Church of Canada, FALL 2001
- "Camp: A Sacred Space", Women's Concerns, the United Church of Canada, SUMMER 2001.

Other creative ideas were generated through brainstorming, design and trial with Rev. Donna Bowman-Woodall, St. Andrew,s United Church, Elgin Presbytery.