

Section 17: United Church Theology

17.1 United Church Theology, Culture & Traditions

Jun 2015

While it is understood that the Camp operates under the umbrella of the UCC it has always been our aim to be non-denominational in our presentation to our campers, with no specific emphasis on either the 'good' or the 'bad' rituals of any particular church's doctrine. We have always lived by the Golden Rule.

Never-the-less it is important that all Leaders, both resource and service personnel, coming to camp understand the theology, culture and traditions of the United Church of Canada.

To accomplish this, the Camp Director is required to present an overview on this topic to all Adult Leaders and Cabin Leaders as part of the pre-camp training sessions. This program may be presented by a United Church Pastor or any other qualified person who is a Member of the United Church of Canada.

What follows is an outline of such a presentation. It has been developed from the March 2014 United Church Theology Resource For United Church Camps. This entire document should be available for any camp staff member who wishes to peruse it.

The foundation of our faith is our desire to be one of Jesus' disciples. We believe that as a disciple it is our mission to continue His ministry - to make a difference in our world.

The basis of this belief can be summed up as follows:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

This teaching uses the United Church's New Creed as a guide. It is short, easy to commit to memory & invites each person to share who we understand God to be!

*We are not alone,
we live in God's world.
We believe in God,
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
By the Spirit,
We trust in God.*

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live in respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.*

*In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone
Thanks be to God.*

As with all Christians, the Bible is the key source of wisdom for the United Church of Canada. The Bible guides us in our daily lives. We use it for prayers, devotions, decision making - in fact all through our daily lives. The Bible helps us understand God's continuing work of creation and liberation in the world, and God's gifts of forgiveness, healing and new life in Jesus.

17.2 Faith Formation Principles

Jun 2015

The United Church of Canada has identified eight faith formation principles to guide camp Boards and staff as they plan and deliver the Christian Education programs at their respected camps.

(Schedule 13) lists these principles and each camp staff leader should become familiar with them.

17.3 Personal Meaning

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

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

United Church Belief:

*We are not alone,
we live in God's world.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.*

The first two components of the Rock Lake United Church Camp Society's Mission Statement say:

. . . provide a safe gathering place to help everyone who attends, to grow socially, mentally and spiritually while having fun in God's creation;

. . . create an accepting environment where all people are acknowledged as unique, important and capable, focussing on love, acceptance and respect for each other;

These statements fall right in line with the reason the United Church of Canada wants to remain in the camping ministry. Each person - each camper - is unique and has been given some special gift by God. It is our responsibility, as staff members, to help each camper understand this concept and to help him/her find their own unique gift.

To understand this concept thoroughly a reread of I Corinthians 12:4-29 (Each one of us has been given gifts by God) would be appropriate.

17.4 Creativity

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

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

United Church Belief:

*We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,*

The philosophy of the Rock Lake United Church Camp Society states:

We believe that valuable spiritual and recreational experiences can be obtained in the outdoor wilderness retreat setting of Rock Lake United Church Camp, removed from the everyday care and routines of life, in the company of others who are seeking recreation and re-creation in the truest sense.

We believe in God the Creator of all things. We believe God created us in his own image. We believe we can create other things to honour God.

To understand this concept thoroughly a reread of Genesis 1:26-28 (we were created in the image of the Creator) would be appropriate.

17.5 Mercy & Justice

May 2017

United Church Principle:

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

United Church Belief:

*to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,*

Jesus welcomed everyone, whether they were poor, rich or just getting by; ill or healthy; self-made or educated; popular or a loner; secure or full of doubts.

We understand that as disciples of Jesus we are called to welcome everyone the way Jesus did. The United Church of Canada sees itself as an inclusive church, aspiring to a practice of honouring and acknowledging the value of all people regardless of age, race, gender, orientation or physical ability.

Point two of the Rock Lake United Church Camp's Mission Statement states:

. . . create an accepting environment where all people are acknowledged as unique, important and

capable, focussing on love, acceptance and respect for each other;

Camp staff are required to:

Help campers be good neighbours,

Help campers respect all for who they are despite his/her size, physical abilities, mental or emotional abilities, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

Assist campers to recognize how they should and can treat others justly and with kindness.

Teach campers the meaning of God's grace.

To understand this concept better a reread of Luke 10:29-37 (The Parable of the Good Samaritan) would be helpful.

17.6 Traditions and Rituals

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

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

United Church Belief:

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,

to love and serve others,

to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,

(Section 12.3.6) of the Rock Lake United Church Camp Society' Operating Manual states:

Besides Bible study time, the camp should include other components of daily Christian living at the discretion of the Camp Director. These could include, but are not limited to, Grace before meals, a daily Chapel, a daily Devotional during quiet time and a Morning Watch teaching.

Camp is an ideal place for campers to develop habits of setting aside time to worship and honour God and to develop the habit of daily prayer.

The best way to do this is by example. All leaders should be encouraged by the Camp Director to participate fully in the camp's Christian activities where practical. A good way to do this is by encouraging different leaders to participate in leading Christian activities at camp.

Remember our aim is not to overwhelm the campers with how devout we are but to inspire the campers with how faithful we are - not by telling, rather by showing.

A good way to reinforce this concept would be a review of the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm.

17.7 Environment & Care of Creation

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

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

United Church Belief:

*We are called to be the Church:
to live with respect in creation.*

Today's camper-age children have become quite aware of how fragile the natural environment is and how easy it has become for us as humans to pollute and destroy the earth upsetting the delicate balance of what God has created. God gave humans dominion over the all that He had created, but with that gift came a responsibility to look after it!

Our statement of faith reminds us that we are to live with respect to creation. We are dependant on creation for all that we need.

All camp staff should be prepared to set an 'environment friendly' example for our campers to follow.

A good way to revisit this concept would be a thoughtful reading of Psalm 104.

17.8 Sabbath

Jun 2015

United Church 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.

United Church Belief:

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate (enjoy) God's presence,*

Rest was important to Jesus. When we rest we recharge.

Generally at camp we 'unplug!' There are no cell phones, no computers, no video games, in fact none of the things that modern kids "just can't live without!" Instead we are called to enjoy the natural beauty of God's creation. Our camp activities should be centred around the natural setting of Rock Lake & the surrounding area.

Our mission is to have each camper enjoy Rock Lake Camp for what it is. To have crafts, games, special events, etc. that reflect who we are and where we are located. Every camp takes advantage of our gorgeous private lake.

Every Camp Director is obligated to provide each Leader and Camper with the appropriate rest and

a quiet time during each day. It is hoped that some kind of Daily Devotional can be set up for these quiet times. Each person at camp should have opportunities to reflect - to observe the camp for nothing more than a beautiful part of God's creation.

To understand this concept better a reread of Exodus 20:8-11 (The Ten Commandments - God Calls us to Rest) would be appropriate.

17.9 Questioning

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

Invite questions from the everyday to the mysterious.

United Church Belief:

*We trust in God . . .
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone*

If Jesus were to come to camp, what questions would you ask of Him? What questions would the campers ask of Jesus?

Be prepared for everything from A through Z. Do not be afraid or leery of these questions. Pray regularly for the appropriate wisdom to handle all that may come before you. Allowing the campers to ask questions is important. But remember, not every question can have an immediate answer. Get help where you need it. Never, ever make something up. Each camper deserves the truth and the best answer for his/her particular question.

To understand this concept better a reread of Luke 2:46-52 (Jesus questions the Rabbis in the temple) would be appropriate.

17.10 Leadership

Jun 2015

United Church Principle:

Develop leaders and enhance leadership qualities among staff and campers.

United Church Belief:

*We believe in God,
who works in us and others
By the Spirit,*

Do you want to be one of God's Leaders - one of God's heros?

How does God choose His leaders - His heros? What qualifications must they have? Does God only

choose perfect people to lead for Him?

Many of God's heroes have been initially far from perfect: (Abraham was a liar who encouraged his wife to become an adulterer; Abraham, himself, was an adulterer; Moses committed Murder; David committed Murder in order to marry another man's wife; Matthew was a despised tax collector; Paul watched while a believer was stoned; are just a few examples of the mystery of God's way. Obviously God does not require perfection!

So if not perfection, what qualities is God looking for when He chooses his 'heroes'? For example, what made Abraham stand out?

- Abraham had the proper posture - He worshipped God with his hands, with his heart and with his mind.
- Abraham had a childlike trust - He properly recognized the Creator as faithful to his promise - He would keep his part of the covenant.
- Abraham was a man of action - He listened to God, he heard God, and then he obeyed God.

God created us in His own image and while we are called to have harmony with Him, others & nature, we are also called to have harmony with ourselves. Even today so many of our personal problems are because we are not in harmony with ourselves. Deep down we do not think much of ourselves. In fact, it is impossible to 'love others' as Jesus commanded, until we learn to love ourselves first. Now don't get the wrong idea. We are not in favour of creating a bunch of self-interested egomaniacs, no we are just preaching the idea that we must learn to accept our own humanness. We must stop tearing ourselves apart with guilt, worry, frustration, fear, etc. THIS WAS NOT GOD'S PLAN! I suggest that later this evening when you talk to God in prayer, you thank Him for making you such that you are! You'll be thankful as you feel better for it!

So we must remain in harmony with ourselves - but be careful of the danger - we can not and must not worship self! This four-fold harmony with God, ourselves, others and nature will enable us to become good Christian leaders not only at camp, but throughout our daily lives. Once we attain this leadership ability, by our actions and encouragement, we can pass it on to others.

To understand this concept better a reread of Exodus 18:13-26 (Moses begins to share leadership with others) would be appropriate.

17.11 What We Believe

Jun 2015

Like other Christian churches, the United Church of Canada is rooted in God, Jesus and the wisdom of the Bible.

However, the way we understand God, practice our faith, and read the Bible is distinct, just as it is distinct in other denominations of the Christian church.

We have two sacraments, baptism and communion, both of which are open to people of any age. We recognize the sacraments of baptism from other Christian denominations.

The United Church works together with other Christian churches whenever possible, and among people of other religions in Canada and throughout the world, on matters of social justice, peace and human dignity.

For a more complete description, it is suggested you review the information on the United Church of Canada website - About Us - Beliefs (www.united-church.ca/beliefs)