

Message: Camping might be just what we need!

Life has certainly changed in the last few generations. The population balance has moved from rural to urban with less than 20% of Canadians living in rural areas. The majority of people you meet as you meander through life will know more about subways, computer technology, and Siri than how to plant and grow enough food to last the winter.

Our very bodies have changed over the millennia. Looking at drawings of ancient humans, you will see different facial structures, based partly on the fact that they did not have as large a forebrain as we do. People are taller today than they were just 150 years ago. We change and we adapt.

Yet, we wonder if the current rate of change in our techno-world is a little faster than we can handle. Many are replacing typical conversation with social media and texting. Some people see a “food source” as being the local grocery store, rarely thinking of the flowchart of activity before an item lands on a grocery shelf. And the food we buy is often a little suspect with respect to how natural it is.

When even children are being treated for stress and anxiety, and young teens turn to increasingly self-destructive behaviour, we wonder what is happening. While there is a growing interest in spirituality, formal commitment to a spiritual community is becoming less common. Can young people develop spiritual connections that provide boosts and strength for both joy and sorrow? Do young people have communities on which they can rely?

We are hyper-vigilant to care about the safety of today’s youth: the right kind of car seats, the best cribs, organic food, safety rules for school and bus, properly trained child care providers, and so on. We follow best practices for discipline and give children choices so that they feel valued. Yet we often keep them inside, inside our house, inside our cars, inside our schools... We can often keep them safely *not outside*.

Church camp helps to address a few gaps in our best intentions to provide for our children, youth, young adults, and people of all ages. Whether it be a church retreat, a day camp, or a week-long outdoor summer camp,

church outdoor ministries/camps are providing unique experiences for people of all ages. These ministries are:

- An invitation to question everything, from the everyday to the mysterious
- Opportunities to gain personal meaning through discovering, naming, claiming, and celebrating our God-given gifts and talents
- Time to stretch our imaginations and grow our creativity
- Occasions to find meaning in community as we engage in acts of mercy and justice
- Holistic ministry that combines body, mind, and spirit
- Inclusion in a community that points toward something larger than individual concerns
- Opportunities to wonder and deepen our awareness of the environment and respect for nature
- An experience of “Sabbath” as we step away from society’s hectic way of life
- Leadership development opportunities for both staff and campers

Spending time outside used to be so common and so natural. Today, it is the subject of studies. Author Jill L. Ferguson contributed the following ideas in [a 2017 online article in The Huffington Post](#). She said that spending time outside can prevent myopia or nearsightedness in children. It can benefit the mental health of adults and children. It encourages exercise, which then correlates to better academic achievement. And spending time outside exposes children to nature, which helps reduce stress levels. Wow—who knew?

In today’s scripture passage, Jesus compares himself to a vine, with productive, fruit-growing branches. Neither the branches nor the fruit will survive without the life-giving vine. Neither will they thrive without God. The pulsing life of our faith is the vine that encourages our good works, our understanding, and our love that encompasses God’s creation.

At church camps, campers and counsellors work to bear the following fruit: They create, play games, exercise, lead and follow. They make new friends, help others, problem-solve together, sing. They explore nature

even as they interact with it. They add to their understandings of diversity, equality, fairness, and faith. They become productive, growing branches that receive sustenance from the vine of Christ's example and guidance.

(Talk about your local church camp)

So let's sit outside, together, around the campfire of our imagination. You will realize that the warmth you feel doesn't come only from the fire, but also from your connections with those around you, and a growing understanding of your place in the universe. Your smiles, your songs, your thoughts become a prayer of gratitude to Creator God. And something inside you wants this to last forever. Amen.