



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC45 COM09 A Call for Strengthening Camping Ministries as Central to Faith Formation within The United Church of Canada, and to Explore Options for how This Vital Work is Structured and Resourced for Summer 2025**

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**Origin: Rhondda Gower (Commissioner and camp counsellor) and Nancy Nourse (Commissioner, Minister, and Board Member with Red Deer Presbytery Camps Society) and concerned members of The United Church of Canada.**

## **1. What is the issue? Why is it important?**

As camping ministry enthusiasts, we believe God/Jesus/The Holy Spirit is calling on The United Church of Canada to help change the mindset and engagement of the whole Church to invest in Camping Ministries as central to our collective work of faith formation.

Our people have long gathered in nature for nurture of minds, bodies and souls, personal enrichment and service to one another in community. Across this country, as the United Church of Canada formed 100 years ago, it included a commitment for also having and supporting opportunities for UCC camps, at a tradition of a location in each Presbytery. Camping Ministries are training grounds for leadership important to our Communities of Faith, and beyond.

Oversight of United Church Camps feels limited to managing the risk of Camping Ministries. We worry that Camping Ministries are not sustainable. Does the UC value Camps and does it

care that they are struggling to resource all that it takes to be healthy and effective? How is the UCC going to support the changing needs of camps?

## 2. What is happening now?

Camping Ministries are facing growing threats to their viability. While independently incorporated bodies, many camps are not independent in the ownership of property that most steward **on behalf of The United Church of Canada**. Camping Ministries are struggling to be adequately resourced (as to traditional business models of Churches within Presbyteries supporting the costs of having and running a Presbytery based camp) and there is a need to begin looking at The overall camping ministry 'system' and explore together, inform together, and research potential sustainable futures.

And yet, with everyone also running camps, it is difficult (near impossible) to get to this critical work and there are not enough resources (time, talents, finances) available to help us move from opinions to facts. From stuck to possibilities. All involved are too busy treading financial waters and trying to have things lined up each summer for another year of summer camp.

It is past time that we come together to imagine, inform and liberate a new system and structure for UC Camping Ministries across the country. It requires intention and leadership to enable and support this overdue work. We need bold, daring and deep leadership to best steward our collective asset for future viability and vibrant, impactful, hope-filled CAMPING MINISTRIES.

There is SO MUCH potential for 'Camp'. Collectively we have enough. What different transformative future could be possible? We are equipped with passionate, skilled people who could support this work if others would commit to joining and if we had more support. Camping Ministries are vital to The United Church of Canada.

Our National Office has demonstrated that it is open to and has capacity for supporting system change. We've done it for our Churches. Now we need to do it for our camps. We cannot rely on staff from the Regions or from the National office to do this for us, we need to do this work together.

Investing in children pays dividends to the whole Church. The whole Church needs to contribute to the investment in camps. In the interest of sustaining vibrant Camping

Ministries for the next 100 years. We recommend that the Church prioritize these critical conversations and study objectively what is viable.

### 3. What is the recommendation?

1. A declaration by leadership from the highest level, that Camping Ministries are central to our collective work of Faith Formation, would compel and encourage every level within the structure of The United Church of Canada to engage in what is needed to collectively respond to the complex challenges and tremendous opportunities of Camping Ministries.
2. That The United Church of Canada direct regions to renew the relationships camps once had with presbyteries for the purpose of strengthening first third ministry and accountability.

### 4. Background information:

Through the process of the restructuring of The United Church of Canada, Camping Ministries were largely left out of the picture. With oversight having shifted from the national office to Conferences and now to Regions, the relationship and support for systems change is challenged. It seems this was so since most Camping Ministries are their own incorporated bodies and so are seen as independent from The United Church of Canada. Affiliates is the term most often used. And yet, the land the camps operate on is ultimately The United Church of Canada's land. We would not exist without The United Church of Canada and we seek to be in a stronger and effective relationship with our Regions and National Church.

We bring this to General Council with curiosity and hope.

### 5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

Over the course of several years, General Council has made numerous commitments on equity such as the following:

- adopting [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as the framework for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;

- adopting the [Calls to the Church](#) from the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle as the basis for a new relationship;
- welcoming [people of all sexual orientations and gender identities](#) into full membership and ministry in the church;
- committing to becoming [an intercultural church](#);
- committing to becoming an open, accessible, and barrier-free church, where there is [full participation of people with disabilities](#);
- working towards functional bilingualism and [ensuring that Francophone ministries are an integral part of the church's identity, mission, and vision](#);
- [opposing discrimination](#) of any kind on the basis of identity; and,
- developing an anti-racism policy and committing to becoming an [anti-racist denomination](#).

This proposal engages all of the principles and positions on equity that the General Council of The United Church of Canada has established. Camping Ministries embody and work with and influence all of these justice seeking spaces - and we do so with YOUNG PEOPLE.

Who has been consulted in the development of the proposal: Others involved with supporting, running and governing UCC camps.

What might be the impact of this proposal on people and communities: NEXT GENERATION and FUTURE GENERATIONS of leaders. This is about continuing viable Camping Ministries for children, youth, young adults and families of today for the sake of future leaders and doers and supporters of tomorrow and after that.

Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by this approach: We need everyone across all structures of The United Church of Canada to lean into this work. We know this is asking a lot from all of us. Through this, we are all disadvantaged as it requires us to commit to some hard work together... and we are advantaged by the opportunity and ability to do that work!

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: [GCinfo@united-church.ca](mailto:GCinfo@united-church.ca)

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