# Pass It On!

A Service for Camping Sunday

*If possible, have a simulated campfire at the front of the church. (Use your imagination). This can be “lit” instead of the Christ candle while welcoming the congregation.*

*Leader (as fire or candle is lit):* We recognize and praise God’s wonderful world just as the psalmist did in Psalm 104:24, “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” (NRSV)

**Introit:** “Fire’s Burning” (see [https://campsongs.wordpress.com/2012/05/04/fires-burning](https://campsongs.wordpress.com/2012/05/04/fires-burning/))

**Opening Prayer:**

Creator God,

We thank you for bringing us together in this place,

to celebrate the recreation, the re-creation, of enjoying the fun and community of camping.

We thank you for all the people in our lives, and especially those who have gathered with us.

We also thank you for all of creation; the hills and trees,

the rocks, the water, the animals of field and forest.

We thank you for your love for us; the love that we in turn share with one another.

Open our hearts to receive your word, to learn more about creation and your love.

Guide us in your love and the spirit of creation

so that we might be examples for others to follow. Amen.

**Call to Worship:**

*Split the congregation into two parts, e.g., right side/left side, front/back*

*Leader:* At some camps, a bell rings to signal the beginning.
Let’s begin Camping Sunday the same way.

*Bell Rings*

First Group: The bell is ringing.

Second Group: We gather for instruction.

First Group: Let’s go to the warmth of the campfire.

Second Group: Can we bring smores?

First Group: Of course! We will all share the warmth of God’s love!

Second Group: Let’s get started!

**Hymn:** “It Only Takes a Spark (Pass It On),” VU 289

**Prayer of Approach:**

One: Creator God, the spark has kindled a fire.

**All: We gather for its warmth and light.**

One: Your love is the warmth that fills our hearts.

**All: Your love lights the way.**

One: First, we experience the warmth and light of your love,

**All: And then we pass it on.**

One: Pass it on.

**Passing of the Peace**: *shake hands or pass the peace to those around you*

**Prayer of Confession:**

Dear God, we love your creation,

yet sometimes refuse to care enough for it.

We love our neighbours as you have taught us,

yet sometimes we hurt them or refuse to allow our differences to transform us.

Your love for us surrounds us in every way,

yet sometimes we fail to acknowledge it.

Out of your timeless greatness, dear God,

please keep loving and forgiving us.

Guide us to do, say, and think according to your will.

Guide us to live in respectful relationship with creation.

And when there are temptations or other examples to follow that lead us away from you,

we ask that you set us aright, yet again.

Our trust in you is complete.

Amen.

**Assurance of God’s Blessing:**

God is the beginning, and through God all things have come into being. God is life and that life brings abundant freedom and live-giving peace for all people. God’s love shines in the most difficult times, and nothing can separate us from that love.

**Sung Response:** “Halle Halle Halle,” VU 958

**Children’s Hymn & Children’s Time** combined:

*Teach the words, meaning, and actions for the song: This Little Light of Mine* (see <https://hymnary.org/text/this_little_light_of_mine_im_gonna_let>). *Optional:* *Give lights (tea-lights, flashlights, or homemade lanterns) to children, so that they can stand and sing a few verses marching around the church waving their lights. (You know your children best!)*

**Scripture:** John 15:1–8

**Hymn:** “What Does the Lord Require of You,” VU 701

*Teach as a round; campers sometimes sing this during the reflection at Vespers.*

**Message Options:**

1. Have individuals share camp experiences about the camp in your area. A variety of ages would be interesting, to highlight the continuity of the camping experience. Welcome all stories—both the happy and maybe not so happy memories.
2. If you are hosting a church day camp/vacation Bible school this year, have someone talk about its theme and some of the stories of past church day camps.
3. If you are celebrating Earth Day today, have someone talk about its themes and stories of engaging in the past.
4. Use the following meditation, adding more specific information about church camps nearby, or your own camping experiences.

**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 story, 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](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/5-benefits-of-being-outdoors_us_5938266ce4b014ae8c69dce0). 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.

**Invitation to Offering/Service:**

As we gather, we recognize that we are truly blessed;

to live in God’s wondrous Creation,

to have family and friends and neighbours that we can depend upon.

As God has blessed us

we, in turn, share a portion of that blessing with others,

our time, talent, and tithes,

in support of the work of God’s church and our camping mission.

The offering will now be received.

**Offertory Prayer:**

Loving God,

accept the gifts of our time, talent, and tithes for the work of your church,

in this community and beyond.

We share what we have so that the warmth and light of your love will spread to everyone,

and we shout from the mountaintops: *Pass it on*.

Amen.

**Prayers of the People:**

God of love, we can learn a lot from the cooperation and fun of camp. In life, as at camp, learning and challenges become stepping stones to our growing maturity. Thank you for surrounding all of us with love, guidance and forgiveness.

We turn away from you sometimes, and doubt you or stop seeking to understand your terms, as opposed to our terms. So today, dear God, our prayers for the people include ourselves and others like us who need reminders about your commitment to us.

Help us to take on a mantle of caring for all life—no matter what our differences are—so that we can make a real difference in the world. There are so many struggling for food or peace, for safety, or for the freedom to worship. We sometimes feel so helpless. Guide us to ways in which we can help those in need; open us to receive your teachings. Help us *let our little lights shine* by showing love to all.

Help us to accept changes in our understanding of your word that encourage deeper thinking, shifts in perspectives and understanding, which can all lead us to a stronger faith. Bless those who are struggling with physical or mental illness, those grieving losses of any kind, and those who are attempting to find honesty in relationships in social, family or work situations. God, help those who are suffering find strength in your love and feel renewed in their faith.

Humbly, we ask your blessing on these our intensions…

Together, we pray as you have taught us to pray: Our Father…

**Hymn:** “Draw the Circle Wide,” MV 145

**Commissioning:**

Take the warmth and light represented by this fire into your lives.

Take the warmth and light of God’s love into your lives.

May the fun and faith of church camps, reside in your minds and hearts.

And…remember to pass it on.

**Sung Benediction:** “Go Now In Peace,” VU 964

*—David Root and Nancy Rouble,
Board members for* [*Camp McDougall*](http://www.campmcdougall.com/) *in Northern Ontario*