

Call to Worship

In the midst of our lives we know you are with us O, God.

In the midst of laughter and fun, joys and celebrations we know you are with us O, God.

In the times of sadness and tears, grief and struggle we know you are with us O, God.

At home, at worship, at camp, at work, among family and friends we know you are with us, O God. Thanks be to God!

Prayer of Invocation

Lord, open our hearts to the possibilities that you bring to us. Help us to see beyond the 'what ifs' and make them instead 'why not?' One-on-one we can make a difference.

Lead us where you would have us go as we worship now and in the days ahead. Amen.

The Word

Matthew 16:13-17 Common English Bible (CEB)

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?" **They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."**

He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" **Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Then Jesus replied, "Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you.

Living the Word

Church Camp has been an important part of my Christian journey. I went to church camp and I sent both of my boys to church camp, from this church 25 years ago. They scanned the brochure and Donald wanted to attend 'horse camp.' It was part of the beginning of his love for horses and his nickname, which many still call him: 'Cowboy.'

For him camp helped him find direction and purpose for his life. After high school he went to farrier school, bought a portable forge and trimmed and shod horse full time for several years until he decided he was ready for college.

Because I feel very strongly about church camp, I have served the Wisconsin Conference, on Camping Boards and Committees for over 15 years, which included four trips to the National Camping Conference.

The first trip was in 2007 and was held at a large camp in the redwoods of California. While there I zip-lined through the top of the redwoods 150 feet from the forest floor. In 2009 I went to Lake Junaluska in North Carolina, 2011 to the middle of Florida and in 2013 to the place in Georgia where John Wesley lived in during his two years in America in the 1700s.

Every conference brought together many camp managers and leadership to learn from each other experts who were studying the trends of the future. It was at one of those workshops in 2013 that David Weber led a seminar on reaching un-churched children. He asked us how many had a church scholarship fund with money in it, and no one signing up for camp. Many hands went up. So he suggested that we get brave and invite the congregation to look for some children that were unconnected to church, but would benefit from church camp.

So on Sunday Feb 10, 2013, at the New Richmond UMC where I was serving, I decided to just mention it with a children's Message on camping. I have to admit my hopes were not very high on the success of this and I wondered where one goes to locate 'un-churched' children. Would un-churched parents even let their children go to church camp? Still, I forged ahead with a lot of prayer and the knowledge that my congregation loved me enough to let me risk failure...

Time for the Children's Message: I began with the skit we just did, entitled "Hallelujah, AMEN!" God and I had put this skit together for the Wisconsin Conference Camping Promotions Committee almost 20 years before. As you know the skit combines congregation participation, singing and a story line.

Everyone that day enjoyed the fun of the whole thing. After the skit, I just said that we had camping funds just sitting and no one had gone to camp for six years. I told them that there were children who haven't experienced any or much Christian Education in their lives, and we had some funds that could send them to a week of church camp, where their lives could and would be changed.

Then I told them that we needed people to locate some un-churched children and we possibly might need more funds to send them. I asked them to pray about it and respond as they could. After the services two different people approached me with an offer to each pay for one camper for the summer 2013. Additionally, in the offering plate was a check for campers of \$1000.

I had 4 brochures available to hand out. How short sighted that was! Over the next 3 months (after ordering more brochures...) I had registrations for 16 campers! One of our members signed up her whole family of six for family camp as their summer vacation.

Four, 3rd -5th grade girls and one sixth grade boy signed up from our church and brought with them two friends from outside church. Then two sets of grandparents asked if their grandchildren (numbering 3) who had little church experience were qualified. I said sure! But I was now counting funds carefully in my head and on paper. I had offered a \$100 scholarship for members of the church and full scholarships for anyone outside the church.

All totaled, I had just over \$2000 collected including the existing scholarships of \$300 from the United Methodist Women. They had offered the \$100 per child, but had never had more than two or three go in the past. When I told them that I was still collecting, they found \$200 more. Then one of the grandparents brought in a check and just enough more appeared in the offering plate.

So they went to camp... here is a glimpse of what can happen there:(Camp video 1)

God put this all together so well. None of these children and the family had ever been to camp before. We received written thank you notes, which we put in the newsletter and 'live, in worship' thanks, along with some of the youth doing camp songs on two Sundays.

Everyone that went that year reported that they wanted to go again the next summer and bring more friends. The second year we had 23 campers. Now, I know that the membership in New Richmond is three times that of Hayward and they have more children, but just think if this year we could find 3 or 4 to send.

Why camp? Many folks wonder why our youth aren't interested in their church and vanish after Confirmation Sunday or they leave for college...it's quite simple really – the youth may be connected to a church, but they aren't personally connected with the knowledge that God goes with them, through other people, wherever they go beyond home.

Ministry of any kind always comes down to personal relationships. Unless the people they connect with at the camp or in the church care deeply for the youth, and work hard to foster a real relationship with them, the youth know that this is nothing more than another attempt to keep them around, with no regard for them as individuals or a unique being created in the image and after the likeness of God.

What they desire more than anything else is a healthy relationship with an adult who cares for them as a person – not just the choices and mistakes they make, or whether or not they come to worship or camp, or even whether or not they stay at the church after Confirmation or while in college, but for *them*, personally, in all of their adolescent craziness and young glory. Nothing else will do.

If you question anyone today who is a Christian why they still believe in Christ and His Church, they will almost always, tell you that it was because SOMEONE took the time to get to know them, helped them find a place within the church and cared for them, personally. In other words, someone was Christ to them.

Over the years I've not yet heard someone say that they were changed just from the camp program or youth groups that they attended – it was always because they had met someone at camp or church, or in a youth group who cared for them, and whose life they wanted to emulate. Our youth learn far more by what is "caught" than by what is "taught."

Church Camp can give them a new venue, undistracted by the usual electronics. A time to seek and find God in the nature, activities and people waiting to help them see that Jesus is the Real Thing; also helping them to know that Jesus' only agenda is to make their life better, happier and fuller. You don't have to go to camp to find this, but it is often difficult at home to "Be Still and Know that I am God..."

In the Matthew passage that we read earlier, Jesus asked those who claimed to be his followers "*Who do you say that I am?*" *Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* Peter had experienced the Living God in time spent with Jesus.

Camping is a part of our churches Ministry of Education, yet no one has even mentioned it since I came. We look around and we don't see them here in worship very often so we assume that they wouldn't want to go to camp for 5 days. Still, besides the ones we occasionally see here, there must be some children and youth that are not connected to this or any church that we can send on a scholarship to experience Christ in this way.

What is offered at camp? All camps offer Bible Study, swimming and crafts, camp fire, eat s'mores and worship for everyone. For those going into 2nd through 4th grade Elementary Explorers is a program with the choice of a full week of camp or a shorter mini-session that best fits camper comfort levels. And more than anything, our goal is to encourage and create those early faith foundations that will help campers grow and succeed when they go home and well into the future! First-Timers Camp is a special experience for those staying at camp for the very first time.

For those going into 3rd- 6th grade there is Adventurers Prime, where there's never a dull moment, because there's always something new and fantastic to do. In addition to what I have already listed for all of the camps they might archery, night games, slip 'n' slide, and rockets

Also for 3rd -6th grade there is Video Games Adventures:

For the third year in a row, Video Game Adventures is ready with a crazy blend of playing video games and encouraging campers to try real life versions of the video game activities they love! Archery, flying drones, remote control car races and much, much more!

OR Treehouse Adventures: Our rustic camp progression starts with our ever-popular Treehouse Adventure! Join other campers as you learn basic wilderness skills including shelter building, open fire cooking, and much more! Campers stay in elevated cabins, and help with basic camp needs like getting water from the hand-pump, gathering fire wood and helping serve each other during meals and canoeing in the 20 foot Voyageur canoe!

Backpack Journeys: Grades 7-9, will have campers learning how to first make decisions when filling their supplied frame backpack and then learning how to hike out to a location to setup their basecamp. From here, campers will do various activities that build on more advanced wilderness skills that help them gain confidence with the surroundings they are hiking through (plant/tree identification, animal tracks, determining useful resources

Journeys: Grades 7-9, camp the way you want it, with activity choices: gagaball, and archery? Or exploring nature with geocaching, biking, and fishing? How about a science week with stargazing, rocket launches, and consumable chemistry? Or perhaps a sampler with a mix of everything!

Grades 3-6 & Grades 7-9, YoMiCa (short for Youth Missions Camp) is an amazing week of camp learning about mission work and how it is impacting different countries and cultures around the world. Additional activities include: tie-dye, a talent show and lots more.

My favorite camp idea is the Night Owl Camp for Senior High students: They get to stay up late and sleep in, with lots of late-nite fun.

Who should go to camp? Not just the children, or the youth. Adults, you can take the whole family for Family Camp, go with a daughter to Mother /daughter weekend for all ages! or take some time with your grandchildren at 'Grandparent-Grandchild Camp' Watch this: (Video 2)

To understand more of the 'How' of camp, look on the camp web page, or pick up one of the brochures. Sign-up before the camps are filled and talk to me about fundraisers, scholarships, and rides to camp.

I was very blessed to serve on the Wisconsin Conference Camp Board. But I don't promote camp just for that reason. I went to church camp the first time as a 9 year old. Like Aaron, I went to get out of chores for a week. My second year something happened that changed my life. It didn't happen at camp, but when I got home. My 4-H calf escaped my lead rope and was running through the fields. My father, uncle and brother joined me in the chase, but it seemed hopeless.

Then I began to pray in song form. At camp I had learned that the song Kumbaya meant 'Come-by here.' As I prayed for God to come by my situation and help us catch the calf, for the first time I understood that God was there to help me when I called. We eventually caught the calf, but I consider this my conversion story, as I realized God loved me enough to stay with me always, I just had to ask. Because of church camp I received the tools to face adversities in life, knowing I could ask God for help...

If Jesus asked you right now "Who do you say I am?" Have you taken opportunities to personally experience Christ enough to know him as the Living God? Wouldn't you want to help make that happen for someone else as well?

PRAY